

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Acts 28:17. And you're on your last leg here in the book of Acts tonight. We began this study in the book of Acts on Wednesday night, October 18, 2017. So I commend those of you who were here for most of it. How many of you were here for all of it? Hmm. Excellent. Congratulations. I don't believe I was here for all of it. No. I was here for all of it. (Laughing)

If you have been here for much of it, the narrative of the book of Acts is so good because it teaches us, really, and gives us a look into the first thirty years of the church history. And so, as you get to the center and to the beginning, you get most of the information. Right? The further away from that starting point you get, the less things stay right. So, we learned a lot about the church and the work of the Holy Spirit and God's plan for our lives.

And what our plan to do in the next few weeks (obviously Jason just shared), we're going to do a question-and-answer next week. I asked Don (Stewart) to come and do a prophecy update; he loves the news and how it relates to the Bible. I really don't care much personally because I just figure the Lord's comin' whenever He's comin'. But he loves - he gets all excited. He gets me all excited, so I said, "Well, come share that." The two Wednesdays after that, you're going to have guest speakers here; we're going to be in Israel with about 80 folks from the church. And then, when we get back we're going to start the book of Ruth - my favorite book in the Bible. And then after that, we're going to go from Ruth forward through the entire rest of the Old Testament historical books before we consider what we're going to do after that. So we're going to be in Samuel and in Chronicles and in Kings. (Pastor Jacks phone rings.....) So we're going to go through those books - Chronicles, Kings, Samuel and we probably will not go through Nehemiah because we've done that recently, and we'll skip right over that. Maybe we'll do an overview for that week. But we want to be sure that we get all of the history books done now on Wednesday nights after Acts.

Tonight we are in Paul's last report, I guess. It started back in chapter 20. When Paul finished his ministry in Ephesus, he began a very circuitous route home through Europe, down through Macedonia, down to Achaia where the Corinthians were. And then Paul eventually would go home to Jerusalem, where he would

effectively end his long third missionary journey; but also would start this last leg of his journey which started with his arrest in Jerusalem. We have reviewed that trip a hundred times for you on Wednesday nights. Suffice it to say Paul ended up in jail in Jerusalem - falsely accused of Jewish laws that he didn't break. He was shuttled off to Caesarea on the coast, where he spent two years in jail - where everyone who was in charge there could have let him go; none of them did. Some wanted money from him; others didn't seem to act on anything. He was convicted but not moved. And so Paul eventually, with a third guy that came into power, asked if he could just have his case heard in Rome, which was a right of every Roman citizen.

And so that's really where this last leg begins - Paul, two years without formal charges. And, beginning back in chapter 27:1, Paul with Timothy, a fellow named Aristarchus, others. They set sail for Rome. They set sail as winter was approaching. They eventually got caught in the storm of the century. Even the professionals thought that their life was over. God had told Paul (in Jerusalem) he'd go to Rome. Paul wasn't so worried about him not making it there; God had always been faithful to His Word. But Paul did, in that storm, pray for the 275 other people on board, "Lord, could You save all of them?" and God told him that He would, that they would lose the boat, but they wouldn't lose their lives. And through a series of circumstances, they ended up on the island of Malta; not down in Northern Africa where they thought they were going to be driven with their boat and just crash into the sandbars and die. But they had actually moved pretty close to where they were headed. And so they spent three months on this island of Malta. The Lord gave Paul a great opportunity to minister. He was able to teach and preach with virtually no opposition, something he'd never experienced, I don't think, in his life. It was as clear sailing as maybe he'd ever received. After three months on this pagan island, with the work of God going forward, the seasons changed. They found a new boat with which they could travel, the centurion that was in charge of this prison gang and others. They sailed to a place called Syracuse and to a place called Rhegium, just kind of up the coast of Italy, to the port of Puteoli near Naples, a 150-mile walk from there along the Appian Way to Rome. So as they landed, Paul was able to meet some Christian brethren. Don't know how they got that far down into Europe, but there they were. We have no sense at all in the Bible of how they were originated there. But Paul got some very comforting and kind of.....I think it blessed is heart to see Christians that were standing with him, that loved him; he wasn't running into the same things that he had run across over those fifteen years being out on the road. As they began to

travel to Rome, people from the Appii Forum, 45 miles from Rome, had already come out there to that city to meet Paul. They had also come 35 miles out to a place called Three Taverns (Inns) - could have been anywhere, Three Taverns. But their love and their support for Paul, if you notice in verse 15 of chapter 28 here, it says that Paul was very much encouraged and "took courage" as they came out to meet him. You've got to understand Paul was going to go talk to Nero. This is not.....he thinks it's his right, and it is, but he has no idea how this is going to turn out. I mean, he's walking into the mouth of the lion, so to speak. There's no godliness in Rome. There's no restraint in Rome. They were always pretty good at law, but they weren't very merciful. And so Paul didn't know. And notice, in verse 15, the brethren coming out to meet him gave him a lot of encouragement.

Verse 16 tells us that when Paul arrived in Rome, they put him in his own rented home with a guard to watch over him 24 hours a day but that he was free to receive visitors. Because he was a Roman citizen - uncharged - this was their treatment. He would wait for a trial. It would be two more years before he would even be seen. We know that from the end of this chapter (verse 30). But in any event, for two years he got to sit, receive everyone that wanted to visit him, meet with people, share with people, reach out to folks. He was exactly where God wanted him to be. And for the first time in a long time, maybe ever, Paul got to minister for several years, unscathed; nobody's killing him, nobody's stoning him, no one's lying about him. He just seems to be able to minister. And so, when you look at his life, and you think, "Well, Lord, how come You're putting the most popular guy in the world, missionary-wise, in prison?" I think Paul might have, looking back, went, "Oh, this has been a lot better than some of those things I've been goin' through." He was fed, he had his own house, he was guarded, he had visitors. But anyway, a man who couldn't sit still has now been sitting still, by the time we end this book, for four years.....sitting still - I mean literally unable to go where he wanted. God had a plan for his life.

So verse 17 says this, "And it came to pass after three days" (after they arrived) "that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: 'Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. For this reason therefore I have called for you, to

see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.' " Paul didn't spend much time sitting around. He, I suspect, believed - after years of opposition - that the news would have gotten to Rome before he did, that he was coming. And so he wanted to head off problems with the Jews. There were, in this time of Rome's history (at least history records) seven very large synagogues in Rome - places that had thousands of people in them. And not knowing what they might have heard about him, Paul wanted to tell his side of the story - why he was there, what had transpired to bring him there, what he was being accused of and why he was suffering. "I've done nothing against our people. I've done nothing against the faith of our fathers. I've been delivered here. The Romans wanted to let me go. They would hear none of that. And so I had to appeal to Caesar to save my life. I'm not here to speak against the Jews. In fact, it is for the hope of all of Israel that I find myself in prison. I'm not here to accuse the nation. I'm here because I believe that God's promise to us of a Savior has come to pass. So the hope that all of Israel shares I'm in jail for today and facing this trial." Now you should know, from a historical standpoint, that the nation of Israel - in this day in Rome - was a very troublesome bunch of people. The Romans found themselves the subject of Jewish riots and rebellion and revolt. Ten years before this, the emperor Claudius in Rome had barred all Jews from Rome just because they were so troublesome; they made 'em all move out of town. "You're not allowed to live in the city limits." But Rome was the center of commerce, and eventually they were allowed to return. But they were never trusted. And they didn't really see Rome as they were captives to Rome; they wouldn't admit that at all. In fact, you might remember that when Jesus was talking to the Jews there in John 8, and He talked to them about being bound and all, they said to Jesus (verse 33), very proudly, "Look, we're Abraham's descendants. We have never been in bondage to anyone. So how can You make us free? Nobody's over us." They were absolutely being dominated by the Romans. So that was the attitude with which the Romans had to deal with the Jews there in Rome. Paul said, and he makes clear, that it was for the hope of Israel - God's promise of a Messiah, the establishment of a kingdom, that he believed that Jesus was that Messiah - and Paul will make that very clear in the verses that follow. That's his message to these guys. "I'm here for this reason. I'm bound because of the hope of Israel."

We read, in verse 21, "Then they said to him, 'We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect,' " (what sect? the one Paul's just identified with) " 'we know that it is spoken

against everywhere.' " So it seems odd to me, reading this, that considering the hatred that Paul had suffered at the hands of the religious folks in Jerusalem and in Caesarea, word wouldn't have gotten here. Maybe the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem realized they would never win here with the Romans; they tried it, after all, for two years right in Caesarea - the Roman (kind of) capital. Or maybe just showing up and messing with a Roman citizen in Rome was a bad idea. Because Paul was now standing on Roman-citizen ground. This isn't Israel's land; this is downtown Rome. Right? This is where the ruling world power sits. So it might very well have been they thought, "Well, we can just cut ourselves off now. We're just speculating. We don't know." But the word hadn't gotten here about Paul to the synagogues at all. Maybe they just said, "Well, at least he's gone, and good riddance, and maybe they'll kill him."

Verse 22 does tell us that the Jews were very interested to hear about the Christian life, the Way, or, as they called it, "this sect." They said to Paul, "Everything we've heard about Christians is completely negative. We would love your take on it." And you have to believe that Paul couldn't have been more happy than to hear this willing audience - without an agenda, with no strife or hatred in their hearts, no plan or scheme. "They just want to know Him, Paul," like, "Oh, finally people I can just share with. It's not gonna hurt me. It's not gonna come back to me." I think for the first time in a long time the door just seemed to swing wide open. So Paul, in his older days, if you will, is finding himself thankful for the opportunity that God kind of set a table before the Jews whom he loved. He said that "I would give my life. I'd go to hell if they could go to heaven." That's what he said about them (Romans 9:3). That's the kind of love that he had for his people. So they asked the question.

Verse 23, "So when they had appointed him a day," (they picked a day out) "many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening." Paul did a lot of talking. I would have loved to have a CD of this. I don't know if they were even makin' CDs in those days. But wouldn't you have loved to have a recording of this meeting? Between Paul and Jewish leadership in Rome, and Paul's in his element. Right? This is his strong suit - an all-day seminar of Jesus in the Old Testament. And the leaders stayed all day. It wasn't enough to come over in the morning, have breakfast. No, no, no. They stayed till nighttime. And they had this sincere hunger for spiritual things, and Paul had plenty of things to share because he always had an answer for the hope

that lay within him (1 Peter 3:15). I can just hear Paul speaking. I can't wait.....I know the Lord in heaven's going to show us the video of all of this stuff. In 4K. He had such confidence in the Scriptures; gave his life for them. Had traveled the world preaching it. Had seen what God's power could do. And he was talking to a people that, in his heart, were the most important people in the world to him - the Jews. That was where his love was. This is what he had mastered and learned over the years. Jesus had said to the Jews there - the religious leaders - in John 5:39, "You search the Scriptures, and in them you think you have life, but you should know that it is them which speak about Me. They testify of Me."

And I think Paul took the Old Testament because that's really what predominantly he had, although there were a couple of books that were out already, New Testament-wise. But this was the Jewish audience, so he would spend time going through the Law, going through the sacrifices, going through the Feast Days, looking over all of the rites and the rituals, and, "Why do we practice these?" and "What do these things means to us?" And every time he just pointed the finger at Jesus. He takes them through Moses, he goes through the Law, he turns to the Prophets. It's almost like the book of Hebrews in audio form because the book of Hebrews is just that - written to Hebrew Christians under attack, waiting for Jesus, losing family and hopes and then thinking about just walking away from Jesus; and Paul writes this wonderful book, and he says, "Look, how can you walk away from Jesus? He fulfills everything you've ever believed. You can't go back to that because it points to Him. So if you walk away from Him, you walk away from this whole thing." I can just imagine how this went. I can see Paul going to Genesis 22 and talking about how God would provide Himself a sacrifice; and how the LORD sent Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, and he was 25 years old. And he hadn't heard from the LORD in this many years, and he hadn't had a child, and yet, through him, the seed would be blessed; and how faithful Abraham was, how Abraham had learned the heart of God, and how God would provide Himself. Or maybe he went to Exodus 12, and he spent some time looking at the lamb of the Passover, where you take this little lamb into your home, you fall in love with it, and then it dies for your sake. You have to put it to death, and his blood becomes your salvation. I can just imagine Paul just sharing verse after verse after verse with these folks in his house. Or every door upon whose lintels this blood fell, believing God's Word. Maybe he went to Psalm 22 and talked graphically about the crucifixion a thousand years before it was ever practiced by anyone. And Paul taking them verse by verse, I'm sure these guys' eyes just lit up. How powerful must his message have been. And maybe he parked at Isaiah 53 for a while. "He was bruised for our

iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (verse 5). I don't know how long Paul spoke, but look, he spent all day. And I'm sure that he didn't have to look them up; I'm sure he knew these things backwards and forwards after all of these years. The predicting suffering of the Messiah. I'm sure he went to Daniel 9, and he reviewed that prophecy, there at the end of chapter 9, which spoke of the exact day that the Messiah would come to Jerusalem to present Himself - the exact day, according to the Scriptures. And how he pointed all of those things out. Maybe turned to Micah 5, where he talked about the birthplace of Jesus as being in Bethlehem. Or to Zechariah 11 about the thirty pieces of silver that were spent in His betrayal, as Judas sold the Lord out. Three hundred prophecies more. I don't know if he went over all of them. How many could you name if you had to right now? For a million dollars. No. I don't.... (Laughing) How many do you know? How many could you turn to? How many could you articulate? I'll bet you Paul was just.....I don't know how many he knew, how many he shared, how many he pointed out. But he felt like, when he was done by the end of the day, "That was a pretty good presentation." That might be a good thing for you to do - know them or learn them or put some aside in your heart. Soon enough you will discover that it takes more faith to reject the Scriptures and Jesus than just to believe in Him; because the evidence is overwhelming. Eventually you just go, "Well, I gotta believe that one. How can this not be true at this point?" All that had proven out to be. So, Paul spent the entire day ministering in his strong suit, in his lane, if you will, without.....I don't know how many breaks he took, but he was the only speaker, and he just drove home with a very willful audience that, for the first time in the book of Acts, is not antagonistic towards him or want him dead or has something up their sleeve. They just want to know, and Paul just, "Ahhhh. Finally. I just get to share with somebody that it matters to them."

We read, in verse 24, "And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: 'The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, "Go to this people and say: 'Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.' " ' " After an entire day of ministry and clearly detailing all that he knew, Paul gives his audience an opportunity to act upon what they'd heard. And,

like every place in the Bible, some believed, some refused to believe - they were in disbelief or they were absent of believing. It wasn't a connection with them at all. Though God gave to every one of them equal opportunity, the responses couldn't have been more extreme. We talked, I think, Sunday about the thieves on the cross and how they both heard and saw the same things, and yet they came to such a different opinion, such a different conclusion; it was either believe or refuse to believe. Now, as a Christian, I can understand you believing in Christ. I mean, if you have all the right information, I don't get not believing it. I really don't. I don't understand that people could honestly look at what Jesus has promised to do and that He has done and that someone, in their logical mind, would go, "Pfft. I'm not buyin' that." Well you're just nuts, then, to me. I mean, that's just nutty! But I realize that's not all that's going on. There's a spiritual struggle, and sin blinds, and the enemy seeks to stand to blind the hearts of men lest they would believe (2 Corinthians 4:4). I know it's the blindness of the enemy, it's the darkness of sin, but it is also the work of the Holy Spirit to restrain the enemy and give men the opportunity to see the Lord clearly. Whenever the Bible is preached, this follows, however - there's life and there's death, there's heaven and there's hell, and this eternity of the soul that hangs in the balance is so important that we just have to speak up.

But you should at least be convinced or comforted by the fact that a guy like Paul and there's no one that is more capable to bring this message than him. If you said to me, "Pick one guy out of the Bible to meet with these people in this place and deliver this message," I'd pick Paul every time. I don't think anybody ever is better at this than he would have been. He's as good as they get, and he can't bring everybody on board. Right? He fails to reach all. Let that be an encouragement to you because more often than not, you're going to have this, "No, I don't want that. I don't want to believe it. I don't want to listen." But that shouldn't discourage you. That's just the battle that goes on. You're just to share, to have answers, to live the life. God saves, you witness, you declare, you reflect. He saves, you don't. You can't save anyone. Nice to have all that pressure off of me. And as a young pastor, I used to take it to heart. I'd say to people, "Get saved," and I'd talk to some guy, "I don't want to be saved!" And I'd go home, just lay awake at night..... "I failed." I don't want any blame. I can't get credit, I don't want blame. You know what I mean? Like if I could take credit for everybody that gets saved, all right, then I'll take blame. But I can't take credit because God saves; I don't. And if people turn away, that's not my fault.....if I've honestly just preached the Lord. And Paul failed, then. But Paul didn't fail. And you won't fail

either. We read it this Sunday - about the aroma of death to some, the fragrance of life to others (2 Corinthians 2:16).

And Paul did one thing that you have to be able to repeat in your own life - he took the Bible, he presented the Scriptures, he rested in the fact that he knows that that will work. And he doesn't go beyond that. He doesn't reach for some tool or some method that would somehow show a different result. The great apostle Paul saw many refuse to believe, yet he just kept on sharing. One group embraces Jesus as Lord; the other, hearing the same thing, turns away. John begins his gospel (in John 1:11) with the words, "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave" (and he uses the word '*exousia*' - privilege) "the privilege to become children of God, to those who believe in His name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

So, here's the gospel. Do with it what you like. We're gonna pray you listen, we're gonna ask the Lord to bind the enemy, we're gonna pray for clarity of understanding and protection from his blindness and a hunger for your heart. But salvation is a work of God in your heart personally, and it isn't upon me to save you or you to save your family. We're just supposed to bring the report. "He who believes in Me is not condemned," Jesus will say (John 3:18). "He who does not believe in Me is condemned already" (why?) "because he doesn't believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

Paul meets with very religious guys who are in a very difficult situation, who are doing their religion under great duress, guys that have sacrificed a lot to be in Rome - to be Jews, to run the synagogues, to meet with the students. And yet they want to hear about "this sect," and Paul is all too willing to tell them. So Paul shared all that he knew to share.

If you don't believe in Jesus tonight, I certainly would like to hear your reasoning because I'll give you mine. And I don't know how well you can stand upon disbelief when you realize all that Jesus has done, and neither do the pastors. You can come up and talk to them afterwards. They'd be happy to tell you.

Well, he persuaded some. Others disbelieved. And when they didn't agree, Paul laid a Scripture to bear upon their reaction. He applies Isaiah to their reaction, if you will. Isaiah 6:9-10. "This is what the Holy Spirit has said through the prophet Isaiah to our fathers - that bringing the gospel to this people - for some, they will see; but others, they won't perceive; their hearts will not listen, their hearts will grow dull, their ears won't work, their eyes will be closed. Because if they understand, and they turn, and they see, they're going to come to Me, and I'm going to heal them." But there're going to be plenty who are going to say no.

In fact, this little verse right here, towards the end of this book, is quoted seven different times in the New Testament - these same two verses. And each time they are applied to the judgment of God in the face of arrogant, religious unbelief; those who have a religious insight but refuse to act upon it. So, Paul knew who had written the Scriptures. Notice he said, "The Holy Spirit said it.....Isaiah wrote it, but it was the Holy Spirit of God speaking." We read in Acts 1:16, " 'Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas.' There's always that attributing the Word of God to the work of God's Spirit; He's speaking these things and writing these things down for us. To know that you have a word that God wrote - you didn't - should give you great confidence in sharing it. People go, "I don't believe the Bible." Well that's too bad. I didn't write it. Maybe you tell the Author you don't believe it because you're not gonna answer to me; you're gonna answer to Him, and He wrote it pretty clearly so that you and I would know what to do.

But we can learn here that hearing the Word is not enough. Even hearing it explained to you very clearly is not enough. At some point, you have to act upon what you hear. There has to be a doing. Right? A response. Because a head full of information is of no value; even Christians can ignore the Scriptures. Jesus washing the disciples' feet at the last supper, He said (John 13:12), "You know what I've done for you. Happy are you if you do it. Follow My example. Don't just hear it, don't just look at it. Embrace it."

So Paul declares, in verse 28, what he had been saying for an awfully long time to the Jewish people. " 'Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!' " Now, verse 29, "And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves." I read this, and I think to myself, "I know, Paul, that the Lord had told you to just move along, but maybe you don't need to tell them right away.

You've had nothing but trouble for the last fifteen years. Maybe you could just shut up for two weeks. All right, you've already shared the Lord with 'em. Just let it go at that." No, no, no. He's gonna push it back. Right? "No. That's why the Lord told me the people aren't gonna listen. The Lord wrote it right there in Isaiah. So God sent me to the Gentiles. They're gonna listen. You guys don't want to listen. Apparently they'll listen." Yeah, you want trouble. You want a knock on the head. You want people to turn against you. Come on, buddy. But that's the guy that Paul is, and he follows the Lord's pattern. And he brings it to the people. He turns and goes to the Gentiles, and you and I - most of you (some of you have Jewish backgrounds) are Gentiles, and here you are saved as a fulfillment of God's promises.

Notice that, in verse 29, the meeting broke up with the people arguing amongst themselves, which at least they weren't arguing with Paul for a change; unbelievers arguing amongst themselves. I've always thought it was a good method of evangelism when you talk to people, start asking them questions, and pretty soon they're arguing with each other, and you just stand back and wait. Not bad. I've seen a lot of Jehovah Witnesses lately settin' up their tables everywhere. They don't seem to want to talk to you; they just want to sit next to their tables. So go talk to them. They're at Disneyland at Disney Walk. We were there Monday for lunch. There they were, just sittin' like this, just waitin' for you to come and ask them about Jesus and the gospel. Pretty good opportunities that we have. So I think it's good to challenge unbelievers of their faith or their lack of it. They would struggle with it for a long time. I don't doubt that some of these people came around later and talked to Paul and said, "I believe."

The book of Acts ends with these two verses. Verse 30, "Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him." The book of Acts ends with Paul in his own rented house for two years. As he waited for his court date, Paul had a house-arrest ministry program. Four years of imprisonment, no charges. No charges. Can you imagine?! "You gotta let me go." "No, I can't do that now." Why would God make the greatest missionary in church history sit down, locked up for four years? Does it make any sense to you? And I think the answer is Paul was given, by the Lord, great ability to witness to folks without restraint. I think the reward for Paul was some years of ministry without pushback, at his heart's content. Everybody who wanted to come could come, and he just ministered to everyone.

And imagine all these guys that were always chained to his wrist or his feet, and they had to sit there. "I work 8:00 to 5:00 and listen to Paul preach from 8:00 to 5:00." "You gotta go to work?" "Yeah." Pretty soon they'd be able to preach the message Paul was preaching. Whether they believed it or not I don't know, but they certainly were exposed to it constantly, weren't they? As God had, through the storm, brought the gospel to those on the island of Malta by the mouth of Paul, for the next two years everyone in Rome who wanted to come to Paul could. And Paul sat in this house, and he wrote what we call today his prison epistles; it meant they were written from prison. He wrote to the Ephesians, he wrote to the Philippians, he wrote to the Colossians, he wrote to Philemon - all from this house, under arrest in Rome; all four of them while locked up. The book of Philippians - the subject was great joy. Can you imagine? "I think I'll write a book about joy." "You're in jail! Four years. You can't get out. Nobody knows what you've done. "Yeah, I couldn't be happier." He was able to write about joy.

During this time, many of Paul's helpers - fellow ministers - came to visit him to encourage him. We're told in Philippians 1 that Timothy came often. Luke came to see him. Aristarchus, that guy that we read about traveling with Paul, came to see him. Epaphras came to see Paul. Judas came to see Paul. Demas came to see Paul; he would later walk away from the faith, but early on (Colossians 4) he came to see Paul. A fellow named Epaphroditus (you might remember his name) came with funds from the Philippian church to help Paul pay for the house, to get his food, provide his needs. In the process of coming here to Rome, he just about died. Paul mentions it in detail in chapter 2 and in chapter 4 of the book of Philippians - that he had begun to pray for this poor guy, Epaphroditus. Because Paul said, "I don't want grief upon grief, and the Lord answered our prayers and raised this guy up so he could go back home." But he risked his neck to come and bring some offerings, I guess, to Paul to help him. Tychicus would be Paul's mailman. He would deliver the Ephesian letter to the Ephesians, he would take the letter to the Colossians, he would take the letter of Philemon as well. Tychicus. He was a mail guy. He worked for the mail service.

How did Paul feel about this time? Well, if you can just turn in your Bible with me for a little bit to Philippians 1, I just want to show you what Paul wrote from here to them about his experience in Rome. Philippians is just a few books ahead. Romans.....RoCoCoGalaPhilCol. That's how I remember it. It's all right. Philippians 1:12 it says this, "But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel," (this

is what he wrote from this prison) "so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add" (conflict) "affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice." Paul says, in verse 12 and verse 13, "I realize that me being in prison here and waiting upon the Lord and all has turned out for the good of the ministry. There are more people getting saved than ever before." Paul, looking back with a very clear vantage point, begins to see things clearly. Sometimes I know in your life the Lord allows things that you hate. You wonder why. "God, how could You?!" Paul was able to write, "I believe now what God is furthering the gospel." I wonder how often we fail to see the big picture. "Oh, we missed the deadline." We didn't get the job. The girl we like doesn't like us. "Oh, my life is fallin' apart. Everything's goin' wrong." And Paul just looked at his prison and went, "Man, I think more people are hearing the gospel!" He couldn't be happier. It's kind of like these bands that used to travel around and play different cities. Now they're just movin' into Vegas. They're doin' residencies. Right? You just go, "Hey, come see me if you want." I think that's what happened to Paul; Paul's doin' residency in Rome. He traveled the country for years. "Man, you want to come see me?" and they did. And not only did they, but the entire army that was there to watch over him, to keep him in chains - they also heard again and again the gospel clearly and often.

So, he never had so much time to share as he did now. He hasn't been beaten up, chased down, threatened or anything for quite a few years. I remember when we started the church - Morningstar. In fact, our 34-year anniversary as a church is going to be on Easter Sunday this year, April 21st. So we'll have to.....I don't know what we're gonna do. (Laughing) I'll say something, and then I won't be able to do it. We're havin' Easter is all we're gonna do. But I remember when we first started the Bible study - the struggle, the people not coming, the prayers that didn't seem to be answered, trying to find a place where you could meet and all. And, looking back, I saw God's faithfulness. But I've learned looking back is far easier than looking forward. I look back. It's like 20/20 vision, eyesight, right? But it's a little harder when you have to look forward. But I love verse 13, here, of Philippians where he says, "It's become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all

of the rest, that my chains are in Christ." I mean, it didn't take long for everyone to realize that Paul was there because he was serving Jesus. In Philippians 4:22, it says, "All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household." I think Paul was just reelin' in the guards, you know? And introducing them to his family.

If you go to Rome today, Nero's palace still stands. It has 175 rooms. It had hundreds of servants' quarters. Paul has a lengthy stay here. He is pretty sure that he's gonna get out. He was able (verse 14 of chapter 1 here in Philippians) to speak without fear. So Pastor Paul is not just sittin' around mopin'. He's preachin'.

The book of Acts seems to, when you read the book of Acts, stop kind of abruptly; almost as if, "Hey, maybe we lost some chapters. What happens next?" But, in reality, God doesn't lose chapters. But I think God ends it this way to say to us the Holy Spirit and the church weren't over yet, but Paul's ministry was over. And we have been told plenty about the history of the early church to direct us, as God's people in our generation, to pray and to be available. We can certainly make the conclusion, in this book, that the reason the church did so well the first thirty years is they really believed the Holy Spirit was still moving, and God's work was still powerful. And if we believe that, then we'll do well as well. The book of Acts closes with Paul in jail about 63 A.D. He will be released, as he expects, in 65 A.D. You can read Philippians 1 & 2 where he writes about his anticipation that he's going to beat this rap or at least he's going to be released. In 67 A.D., Paul is re-arrested, taken back to Rome, and placed in a dungeon called the Mamertine dungeon or Prison. And it is in that dungeon and, again, you can go to Rome and walk into the Mamertine Prison, underground, lots of corridors, just dark and dank; and they, actually, these religious people in Rome will tell you stories about how Paul never came there but Peter did. Biblically we would say Peter may never have gotten there, but we know Paul did. But regardless, it is right in the middle of town. It is by the Coliseum. And it is from that little hole in the ground - two years later, after Paul's been released - that he writes 2 Timothy before he dies. And that time Paul says, "Well, I'm not getting out of this. This is it. I'm done. I've run the race. I'm waitin' for my reward." And Paul just is assured that this is not going to last any longer. In fact, let me read you what Paul says in 2 Timothy. If you're in Philippians, you can just keep going forward if you want. But in chapter 4:6 of 2 Timothy, he wrote this. "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the

crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing." So, his last words were he was going to look for a reward of a life faithfully lived and invested in the lives of others. Paul goes on, and he says to Timothy (verse 9), "Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica - Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark" (John Mark, remember that young man he sent packin'?) "and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come - and the books, especially the parchments." And then he warns Timothy about the coppersmith there, who has been such a brutal kind of a harm to him over the years in Ephesus.

So Paul had ministered to thousands. But if you read Timothy here, his last days were spent with just a few. He kept Luke close. Paul wanted to see little John Mark, who is no longer little or young. But God would restore them. And Paul finally says, in verse 13 there, "Bring me the Old Testament scrolls. I need God's Word. God hasn't failed me." But then he said this, towards the end of 2 Timothy, "The Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. So greet Priscilla and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed in Corinth, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick. Do your utmost to come before winter." And then he says hello, and it was kind of like he says, "I don't have much time. Get here fast." Shortly after that, he was beheaded. He died alone. He was abandoned by most folks, in a faraway land. His faithfulness still blesses millions of people today as you read through the New Testament. But he's really one of those Hebrews 11:38 guys "of whom the world was not worthy."

And so the book ends, but the work of God does not. Acts, though, ends church history except for the book of 1, 2 & 3 John and the book of Revelation, which were all written about thirty years later. This is the entire history of the 1st century of the church. All of the letters that come behind Acts were written during the time of Acts to the various churches and church plants, second journeys, third journeys - we just mentioned a few of them - his prison epistles as well. But that's it. That's the end of.....as we're going to do the rest of the Old Testament history and then the prophets kind of fit into the history, so the book of Acts ends the New Testament history, and all the epistles kind of fold over except the last four books in your Bible; and those are written just thirty years later. They don't give you much history, actually; they just give you a report. A

little report in 1 John, especially, about the three generations that have passed since Jesus went into heaven. So who knows, you know? The work of God's Spirit goes on until the last person comes in. So there're lots of chapters of Acts left in the modern church because we're in that line, aren't we? Still witnessing, still sharing, still sometimes suffering for sharing. But always sharing and carrying God's Word to others, relying on the Holy Spirit.

If you're the last person on earth to get saved before the Lord comes, would you get saved tonight please and don't hang all of us up so much? (Laughing) I've always thought there's one guy that's messin' it all up. Right? There's gonna be that one guy. Probably you. If you just, "Yes, I believe," then we can all get out of here. But, no. You're gonna hold out. If you come to Jesus tonight and get saved, maybe you won't have to make us wait any longer. But here's the deal, right? Believe or don't. Eternity's at stake. And you're gonna have to respond to what God has said from your heart. And if you do, He'll meet you here and give you life. Always the case.

So, question-and-answer next week. Prophecy update. Some guys comin' to fill in. I forget who they are. It doesn't matter. Just come anyway. Okay? And then we're gonna start the book of Ruth. Have you read it? It's pretty short. And then we're gonna start in 1 Samuel. So look ahead, pray ahead, bring folks with you, encourage them to come to church during the week. We look forward to taking you through the Old Testament history.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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