

Acts 28: 11-24; “For the Hope of Israel”, Sermon # 92 in the series – “Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on February 5th, 2023, in the Morning Worship Service.

As we come toward the end of the book of Acts, I want you to see how much Paul was concerned for the salvation of his fellow countrymen; his kinsmen according to the flesh, the Jews. All the way to Rome, whenever he could, Paul sought to see those who Luke refers to here as the brethren. In verses 14 and 15 of our text, I think that Luke is speaking of the Christian brethren who wanted to see Paul. Probably, many of these were Jewish Christian brethren. I believe that from verse 17 on to verse 24, when the word “brethren” is used, Luke is referring to the unconverted Jewish brethren whom they sought to see and preach the gospel to them.

In this message I want to show you what was uppermost in Paul’s mind and heart in terms of his preaching the gospel to the Jews. He wanted to convince them that our Lord Jesus Christ was then, and He is now, the Hope of Israel as he says in verse 24. So 1st of all – I want to speak to you about the Hope of Israel as having been found by some brethren in Italy. (verses 12-14) Then 2nd – The Hope of Israel in chains, as personified by the apostle Paul. (verses 15-20)

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Evidently, Paul and his traveling companions, and Julius, and the prisoners, were detained 3 months on the Island of Malta because of the winter weather. At that time they found an Alexandrian ship to take them on toward Rome. First they landed at Syracuse where they stayed for 3 days. From there, it says in verse 13, they circled round and reached Rhegium. And on the next day of travel, it says, the south wind blew, which helped them on forward. And by the next day they made it to a port city on the southwest side of the Italian peninsula called Puteoli. It says that at Puteoli, they found brethren there and were invited to stay with them for seven days.

These were Christians who desired to meet the apostle Paul and even to be able to worship together with him on the Sabbath or the Lord’s Day. In this way they could enjoy much good fellowship together and be instructed and built up by him through the gift that God had given to Paul. Julius, of course, had to approve of this. But he did, and it indicates that the centurion was very favorable towards Paul and his mission and his ministry. He may have even been converted to Christ at some point during this trip. The fact that they found brethren at Puteoli is really quite amazing, and it shows that the gospel had already made significant inroads into Italy.

Possibly some of these people had been converted under the apostle Paul’s ministry in Asia and had moved up into that area. But John Gill says – “Particularly there were many Jews here, to whom the Gospel was first preached and to some of them it was the power of God unto salvation in many places, and doubtless was so here.” We should also remember the note that the writer to the Hebrews places in chapter 13, verse 24 – “Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints.” “Those from Italy greet you.” Perhaps Paul wrote the epistle to the Hebrews somewhere around this point in time. I personally believe that it was Paul who wrote that book.

Paul and all the other Christians with him were invited to stay with them seven days. No doubt, during this time, Paul was able to teach them a good many things about the ministry that was specifically entrusted to him. I believe that what he taught them during those days was probably many truths related to his knowledge of the mystery of Christ. Turn with me over to Ephesians chapter 3, verses 1-7, and I will show you what I mean. “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles – if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly

written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.”

I want you to see just how difficult a thing it was for converted Jews, especially, to understand the great purpose of God, which was to bring Gentiles into the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ was the Jews promised Messiah, and they could understand that. They had always looked forward to His Coming to Israel. But they did not understand that the purpose of God was not simply to keep the Jews exclusively as His special people and an elect nation, by themselves, through all generations of time. But according to His eternal purpose, He would, through Christ’s fulfilling of the law, and His death on the cross, break down the barrier between Jew and Gentile, and make them into one New People in Christ’s Church.

But I also want you to see that it was also conceptionally difficult for the Gentiles to understand the greatness of the gift that they had been given in Christ. Not only in being individually saved from their sins, but also being brought into the commonwealth of spiritual Israel. Listen to Ephesians chapter 2, verses 11-13. “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands – that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

Paul goes on to say – “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.” And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.” “For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.” “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...”

So, this is what I believe Paul taught these brethren at Puteoli. What is there here for us? Well, I think that there are many Christians today who need to be carefully taught concerning this truth of the mystery of Christ. The mystery of Christ is not only found in His Person, His being fully God and fully Man, two natures in one Blessed Person. But the mystery of Christ is also found in what He came to do. He came not only to die for our sins, and on the 3rd day rise again for the justification of all who believe in Him. He died for His Church. He gave Himself for her that she might be without spot and wrinkle. He lay His life down and took it up again in order to build His Church into a body where we teach and learn from each other in a humble way.

In His Church we are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, as it says in Galatians 3: 26. In verses 27-29 Paul says – “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” What a great truth this is. And these early churches that were formed in Italy, they needed to understand this. That the distinctions of race or personal nationality, or whether they were slave and free, or even if they were male or female did not matter in terms of the blessings and benefits of salvation coming to any one of them.

If they believed in Jesus, they were, and they all are still today, all sons and daughters of the living God. They are all on an equal footing in regard to coming into, and being a part of Christ’s

Universal Church. They are all on the same level as regards entrance into any legitimate local church. The Jews are not above or over the Gentiles. Those who were free and had slaves were not to consider themselves as having any greater spiritual privileges than their slaves. And the bondservants in those times before slavery as an institution was abolished, they were to count their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God would not be blasphemed.

Male and female in the local church have always had the same spiritual privileges of the blessings of salvation and of church membership, even if their responsibilities within the local church differed according to apostolic injunction. For instance, it is the responsibility of the males in a local church to pray in the public corporate prayer meeting of the church. It is for the women to remain silent, but not to be inactive in prayer in their minds and hearts. This is not because the women are in any way inferior to the men. It is, as Paul explains in 1st Timothy 2: 12-14, that he would not permit a woman to teach and exercise authority over a man, but to be in silence.

Why? Because Adam was formed first, and then Eve. And because Adam was not deceived but it was the woman (Eve) who was deceived and fell into transgression. So these apostolic commands are safeguards which Paul has enjoined upon all of us in the local church. They are given for our being holy and most useful to Christ in the station in life, and in the local church which God has placed us. The Hope of spiritual Israel, Jesus Christ our Lord, is best seen through our holding the mystery of Christ, jointly, and all together in terms of our obedience to the truth which the apostles gave us. Christ has died for us so that we as His body might show forth the glory and power and wisdom of His grace and truth. He is the hope of all His spiritual Israel.

2nd – Let's think about the Hope of Israel in chains, as personified by the apostle Paul.

(verses 15-20)

In verse 15 it says that the brethren heard about Paul and his traveling companions being at Puteoli and they came to meet them as far as Appia Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them he thanked God and took courage. No doubt these brethren had heard about Paul from the saints in Puteoli that he was a prisoner and that he was wearing a chain. But they were not ashamed of his chains. They knew that he was suffering these things for all of the right reasons. Paul gave thanks when he saw them because he knew this, and he very much appreciated their love for him and their loyal support of his ministry.

It says that he took courage when he saw them. He very much heartened when he saw them. Because of their coming to meet him, he felt that he was not going into this alone, but that there would be other brothers and sisters who would be praying for him and supporting him in relation to all that he would accomplish for Christ and the gospel. This is an important thing; to be a Christian who wants to support and encourage those men who are called to preach and pastor churches.

You see Paul mention the importance of a man publicly owning and supporting Paul in his ministry in 2nd Timothy 1: 15-18. "This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes." "The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me." "The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day – and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me at Ephesus."

Now Paul had finally come to Rome and the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard there. But it says that Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him. God Himself, and Christ Himself, were watching over Paul every step of the way to Rome, and his being able to dwell in his own little place was no little blessing. But Paul did not waste time in beginning to minister to Jews who lived at Rome. Verse 17 tells us that he called the leaders of the

Jews together, and when they had come 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 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.

You will remember that neither Festus nor king Agrippa believed that Paul was guilty of anything and that he could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar. Paul tells these Jews why he appealed. It was not that he had anything of which to accuse his nation. He said that he had called these Jews to himself so that they would listen to him speak of the hope of Israel. It was for that Hope that he was bound with a chain he told them. They said to him that they had not received letters concerning Paul, nor had any Jews who came reported or spoke anything evil about him.

But they desired to hear from him. Because they had heard much about this sect. (They meant Christianity) For they knew that it had been spoken against everywhere. So they appointed Paul a day in which they would hear him. They came to his lodging, and 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. What a great outreach to his own people, the Jews, in Rome! Here is an apostle in chains speaking of Christ and His fulfilling the Law and the Prophets and Christ and Him crucified.

What better way to preach Christ than this; by showing these Jews that he was willing to suffer for the sake of Christ who was, and is still today, the Hope of Israel. He used to be a persecutor an aggressor and a violent man. Then Christ saved Him as one born out of due time, he says in 1st Corinthians 15: 8. “Then last of all Christ was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.” “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”

The words “born out of due time” have an interesting meaning. The word in the Greek is εκτρομα (ektroma) and it means in this context, one born out of due time, or born prematurely. Paul was given the New Birth by Christ on the road to Damascus. And when he came out of the womb, spiritually speaking, he came out prematurely as an apostle. He had not the training of the twelve that the other apostles had. He had to make up for much lost time in a manner of speaking. He had not understood the greatness and the glory of Christ, or of the way of salvation. But Paul didn’t waste any time. Immediately he began preaching Christ in the synagogues, that He was the Son of God.

And he the persecutor became the persecuted by his own fellow countrymen, the Jews. Now after many years of arduous labors, he now finds himself chained to a Roman guard. But in this he was fulfilling his ministry. Paul the apostle faithfully represented Christ to his own people the Jews by his willingness to be the prisoner of the Lord on their behalf. He solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, that is Christ’s kingdom. He loved his nation and His people the Jews. He longed very much for their salvation. Some Jews which he spoke to were persuaded by the things that Paul said. Others disbelieved.

We shall see Paul’s response to those who disbelieved in my next sermon. But let these words of Paul’s resound in our minds concerning his great desire for them. “Brethren, my hearts desire and prayer to God is that they may be saved.” Let us cultivate that desire ourselves and pray for their conversion, not only for them as individuals, but also as an elect nation. Paul shows us in Romans 11 that this is God’s purpose and in His time, He will bring it to pass.

