

## Scripture Reading:

Acts 28:23-31

So when [the Jewish leaders] had appointed Paul a day, 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. 24 And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. 25 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, 26 saying, 'Go to this people and say: "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive; 27 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 & hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them." ' 28 "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves. 30 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him."

# "Paul Preaches the Kingdom"

Well, at long last we come to the end of our journey through the Books of Luke and Acts: The orderly account that was presented to Theophilus that he might know the certainty of those things in which he was instructed. I hope that many of us, especially our younger members, will look back on these years as a time where the certainty of their faith was firmly established... It has definitely been such a time for your pastor!

- We have made the case that the Book of Acts is the story of how the Holy Spirit is going to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus.

In Luke, and the other Gospel accounts we learn that Jesus came as the Messiah sent to save God's people from their sins: He paid the price for our sin on the cross, was raised in power and is now seated at God's right hand.

- Those whose sins are forgiven are members of His body, the Church, the Bride of Jesus!

It is through the Church that the Holy Spirit fulfills all the promises that God the Father has made to His Son...

- At the end of history, all the Kingdoms of this earth will be under the rule of Jesus and His bride will be adorned and ready for the great Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Now I made the point very early in this series of messages that it was VERY important that we see this big picture or we would be somewhat disappointed with the way Luke ends his orderly account.

As a young Christian, I have to admit that I often thought the end of Acts was a bit abrupt leaving us wanting more... You will find no end of speculations in the commentators about whether Luke died suddenly or was planning to write a third part, or even that he did and that it was lost!

- I have learned down through the years to simply trust that the Holy Spirit has given us exactly what He wanted us to have in the Scriptures!

Such is certainly the case here with the Book of Acts and if we understand the flow of this orderly account we now see that it ends right where it should end:

**“30 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”**

**Pastor Doug Wilson has rightly said at times that the history of the world is a series of God’s victories cleverly disguised as defeats. We see that principle most clearly at the cross where all seems lost from a human standpoint at the very time where God was carrying out the complete destruction of sin & death.**

**I want us in this final message to see that while Paul appears to be in a weak position, the Holy Spirit is carrying out His mission...**

- **A mission that continues down to our day!**

**So the Apostle Paul continues under house arrest for two years, chained to a Roman soldier night and day.**

- **That certainly does not sound like a triumphant ending!**

**But notice that Luke tells us that Paul, 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.”**

**IF we believe in the sovereignty of God then it should not be hard to believe that the Holy Spirit brought all those who needed to meet with Paul to Paul and he met with them without any hindrance or interference.**

**What I want us to consider this morning is just what he shared and why Paul had such confidence.**

- **Paul preached the Kingdom and taught them about Jesus!**
- **If that reminds you of the Great Commission it should!**

**Matthew 28:19: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.”**

**John the Baptist said that the Kingdom of God was near, Jesus said the Kingdom had come and now Paul is sharing the Good News that the Kingdom encompasses all the nations.**

- **So why does Luke tell us that Paul was confident as he languished in this Roman bondage?**

**To answer that question we must honestly consider what Paul knew about where history was going... There were two MAJOR events that would soon take place, which would have seemed unbelievable at the time, but which Paul could be absolutely certain WOULD take place.**

- **We have studied and considered both at length during our journey!**
- **The first involved the nation of Israel to whom we saw Paul give his final warning last week.**

**The Old Testament had predicted that God’s own people would reject Him going all the way back to the warnings in Deuteronomy up through the Psalms and Prophets.**

- **Jesus gave a graphic description of this final destruction in Matthew 24 and made clear that it would take place in THAT generation, Paul’s generation!**

**The disciples of Jesus had come to Him in wonder about the beauty of Herod’s Temple and thinking that Jesus would soon rule from Jerusalem and crush the Roman occupiers.**

- **They continued to be confused about this right up until the time that Jesus ascended into heaven.**

**Now much of the language in Matthew chapter 24 is apocalyptic language, and so we have had many, many debates down through church history about what it means.**

- **What we must always remember as we study these passages is that Jesus told His disciples not once, but TWICE that all of these events would take place in that generation.**

Paul now sits in Rome near the end of that time, knowing that very soon, the nation of Israel would no longer exist. They would incur the judgment Jesus had described AND he would at this point hope and pray that the Saints in Jerusalem would heed the command of Jesus to flee when the time came.

We as those looking back on history know that this destruction took place in AD 70 and that in fact the Christians did heed the warning of Jesus! Paul had told the Jewish people that salvation was now going to the Gentiles and he had the confidence to know that God Himself would soon make sure there was no turning back.

- Sadly, this is a lesson that has been lost in many Christian circles today and I trust that our study of Acts has prepared us to help our brothers and sisters have a right understanding of this part of history.

Paul's confidence also came from his knowledge of what was about to happen in the Gentile world...

- And this is a lesson that should give us confidence today as well!

Jesus had predicted the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, knowing that it would come at the hands of the Roman armies.

- Paul now sits as a prisoner of that same Empire and yet he is preaching the Kingdom with confidence!

Again, his confidence came from the authority of God's Word!

- The Apostle Paul knew exactly what was going to happen to the Roman Empire AND the Kingdom he preached!

Paul would not live to see either of these events in history, but none-the-less he KNEW they would take place! While Dr. Peter Leithart makes a great case in his latest book, that the advance of the Kingdom was present from the very beginning of the covenant with Abraham, we will look again this morning to what I think is the clearest picture given in the Old Testament...

- Passages that would have been very familiar and very relevant to the Apostle Paul.

Let us turn again to that 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of the Book of Daniel... We are told that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of his reign, King Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and that his spirit was so troubled that his sleep left him. The king turns to his magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers, looking for an interpretation of his dreams.

However, the King tells them that they must first tell him what the dream was BEFORE they give the interpretation! They go back and forth a bit, but the King holds firm and says he will simply kill them all if they cannot tell him the dream and give the right interpretation. These Charlatans rightly answered the king when they said:

"There is not a man on earth who can tell the king's matter; therefore no king, lord, or ruler has ever asked such things of any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean. 11 It is a difficult thing that the king requests, and there is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh."

- This angers the King and he gives a command to destroy all the "so-called" wise men of Babylon.

Of course this would include Daniel and his friends, so when Daniel is told about what is going on, he goes to the King and requests more time.

- Daniel goes to his friends and they plead for God's mercy and then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision.

Daniel rightly gives thanks to God, but in doing so he gives us some important insights into what he is about to reveal to the King, and to all of us...

"So Daniel blessed the God of heaven. 20 Daniel answered and said: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, For wisdom and might are His. 21 And He changes the times and the seasons; He

removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise And knowledge to those who have understanding. 22 He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with Him. 23 "I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; You have given me wisdom and might, And have now made known to me what we asked of You, For You have made known to us the king's demand."

➤ Daniel tells the commander to hold up on the executions and he is quickly taken before the King:

The king asks Daniel, "Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen, and its interpretation?" 27 Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, "The secret which the king has demanded, the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, and the soothsayers cannot declare to the king. 28 But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.

- 'in the latter days' is a phrase that has various uses in the Scriptures and is greatly abused by some, but when we see the interpretation of the dream there can be no question that Paul lived in those last days!
- Daniel explains to the King that he was given the dream and interpretation by God not because he was wise, but because he was God's instrument and so he tells the King his dream:

"You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. 32 This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. 34 You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. 35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. 36 "This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king."

- Now there are places in the Scripture where we are left a bit of room to make various interpretations, as we did last week with some of the parables that Jesus told.

**BUT** with this dream, Daniel writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit leaves no doubt about what is being taught and how it is grounded in real history! [if we are honest]

- First Daniel tells the King about the head of gold...

37 "You, O king, are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength, and glory; 38 and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all--you are this head of gold."

- Then Daniel explains that Babylon will be followed by two more great Kingdoms.

39 "But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth."

We see the Persians take over Babylon in Daniel chapter 5 when the handwriting on the wall tells the King's son that he has been weighed in the balance and found wanting. The Greek Empire of Alexander the Great is identified as the 3<sup>rd</sup> kingdom in Daniel chapter 8. Then we come to the 4<sup>th</sup> Kingdom:

40 "And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others. 41 Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, just as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay."

Daniel goes on to give more details about the Roman Empire of Paul's day and then tells us that "in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. 45 Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold-- the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure."

46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face, prostrate before Daniel, and commanded that they should present an offering and incense to him. 47 The king answered Daniel, and said, "Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret."

Now I hope you can see where the confidence that Paul had came from...

- The sure promises of God!

Yes, Paul was chained to a Roman soldier under house arrest awaiting his trial before Emperor Nero...

Yes, Rome ruled all of the known world at the time with an iron fist...

- BUT Paul knew the rest of the story!
- The Apostle Paul knew that Rome had already been struck by Jesus, the stone cut without hands and it would soon be as chaff in the wind!

Paul served Jesus whose Kingdom had been established...

- A Kingdom that would now fill the whole earth!

Do you think some may have thought Paul was crazy or at least delusional? Do you think there were some in that day who tried to "spiritualize" the words of Jesus or Daniel thinking that to apply them to REAL history would require WAY too much faith?

- Who in that time could imagine the destruction of Jerusalem or the fall of the Roman Empire?

Paul not only could, but was confident about where history was going! Could he give all the details? NO!

BUT he knew that in a very short period of time BOTH events would be recorded acts of history that future Saints would look back on.

- This is why it is important to see the Book of Acts as the story of how the Spirit of God is going to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus!

It is not just the story of the Disciples, or the early church or even the Apostle Paul... This may be why Luke does not tell us about what happens to Peter or Paul at the end of their lives...

- There is LOTS of speculation, but we must remember that the Spirit did NOT preserve that part of the story.

Where He leaves us is with a picture of the Apostle to the Gentiles believing the promises of God and preaching about Jesus and His Kingdom with all confidence!

That is a calling and a practice that He wants us to have in our lives today!

- Do we believe that God knows where history is going?
- Do we have the confidence to believe that what God has promised in His Word will come to pass?

You see, if I ask for a show of hands for those who believe the promises of God, I assume that all our hands would go up, but here we are talking about real confidence in those promises.

- Paul was not worried about the restrictions of his residence or even that chain because he knew it would not last long!
- Soon Rome would be gone and the Church would be advancing!

Wouldn't it be sad, if we today, who can look BACK on history and see that the very events that Paul believed would happen soon DID in fact take place, were those who fail to believe the promises that apply to us today?

I want to leave us with the challenge to be like the Apostle Paul, "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him."

- Where should such confidence come from?
- The Word of God of course!

Read and believe the promises made to Abraham which tell us that through his Seed Jesus, all the nations of the earth would be blessed!

Read and believe the interpretation of the King's dream in Daniel chapter two... Yes, I mean the part about the Kingdom filling the whole earth.

Read and believe the Great Commission knowing that we are called upon to disciple the nations!

Read and believe the vision of history that Paul shared with the Saints in Corinth when he explained to them the real power of the resurrection of Jesus:

**"20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead.**

**22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign UNTIL He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death."**

- This is the confidence that we should have today!

The early Saints believed the promises of God and in many cases laid down their lives to advance the Kingdom when it was much harder to see how history would unfold.

Today we have some BIG promises to believe, like all the nations being given to Jesus as was promised in Psalm 110 or the Church as the Bride of Jesus coming as Paul promised in Ephesians chapter 4: "to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" Yes, that means ALL the Saints, from all quarters of Christendom, which in my mind is very similar to asking Paul or the other 1<sup>st</sup> Century Saints to believe that Rome would fall!

Yes, these are BIG promises and from a human standpoint almost impossible to believe...

- But it is not we who must fulfill them, but the God that we serve.
- The same God who accomplished the events that were revealed to Daniel and anticipated by Paul!

He must be the source of our confidence as we believe that God the Holy Spirit will bring glory to the Son by filling the whole earth with His Kingdom...

That is the story of the Book of Acts...

- A story that continues right down to our day and a story in which God has an important part for each of us to play!
- May we join those Saints who have gone before in faithful obedience!

**Communion Meditation: Acts 2:42 “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.**

**43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.**

**44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”**