

The Book of Acts

Lesson 26: Trials, the Voyage to Rome, and the Gospel Unhindered -- Acts 24:1-28:31

Paul's road to Rome runs through a courtroom. Before the governor Felix, his accusers hire a smooth orator to indict him, but Paul answers with a clear conscience, confessing that he worships the God of his fathers and holds the hope of a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. Later, when Paul reasons with Felix about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment, the powerful governor is alarmed and sends him away: go away for now; when I get an opportunity I will summon you. That convenient time never comes. Felix leaves Paul in prison for two years, hoping for a bribe.

When Festus succeeds Felix and the pressure mounts, Paul exercises his right as a Roman citizen and appeals to Caesar. So he is brought before King Agrippa to state his case, and Paul seizes the moment not to save his skin but to preach the gospel. He tells of the risen Christ who sent him to open people's eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith. He calls them to repent and turn to God and to prove their repentance by their deeds. Agrippa famously replies, in a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian? And Paul answers that he prays all who hear him might become as he is, except for these chains.

Then comes the sea. On the way to Rome a violent storm batters the ship for days until all hope is lost, but an angel stands by Paul in the night: do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar, and God has granted you all those who sail with you. The ship is destroyed, but every one of the 276 aboard reaches land alive, just as God promised. On the island of Malta, a deadly viper fastens on Paul's hand and he simply shakes it into the fire, unharmed, and God works healings through him.

And so Paul comes to Rome at last, a prisoner in chains, yet more free than his captors. For two whole years he lives under guard in his own rented house, welcoming all who come to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. That is the last word of the book of Acts, and it is no accident. The gospel that began with a hundred and twenty praying disciples in an upper room has reached the capital of the world, and nothing, not prison, not storm, not the might of Rome, can hinder it. The story is not over; it has only just begun, and it continues through us.

Group Discussion: The book of Acts ends with Paul a prisoner in Rome, yet proclaiming the kingdom of God with all boldness and without hindrance (vv. 28:30-31). Why do you think Luke ends the story this way, and what does it say that the gospel could not be chained even when its preacher was?

Personal Reflection: When Paul reasoned about the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, go away for now; when I have an opportunity I will summon you (v. 24:25). Are there areas where you sense God's call but keep putting it off for a more convenient time? What is God asking of you now?

Read Acts 24:1-28:31

Study Questions

1. Paul stood before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, and in each setting he bore faithful witness to Christ (chs. 24-26). What does Paul's conduct before these rulers teach us about witnessing faithfully in every circumstance, even hostile or unlikely ones?
2. Paul bore witness to Christ whether before a hostile mob, a corrupt governor, or a king (chs. 24-26). Where has God placed you that you have not seen as an opportunity for witness? How might you bear faithful testimony there?
3. As Paul reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment, Felix became alarmed (v. 24:25). What does this teach about the way the gospel confronts the conscience, and why is the reality of coming judgment part of the message?
4. Felix was alarmed by the truth but said, go away for now; when I have an opportunity I will summon you, and that convenient time never came (v. 24:25). Where do you sense God's call or conviction but keep putting it off for a more convenient time? What is the danger of delay?
5. Paul said Christ sent him to open people's eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness and a place among those sanctified by faith (v. 26:18). What does this verse reveal about what the gospel accomplishes in a person's life?
6. The gospel transfers us out of darkness and into light, out of Satan's power and into God's (v. 26:18). If you are in Christ, you have been brought from darkness to light. How fully are you living in that light, and where do shadows of the old life still linger?
7. Paul preached that people should repent, turn to God, and perform deeds in keeping with their repentance (v. 26:20). What does this teach about the nature of genuine repentance, and how is true repentance shown by more than words?
8. King Agrippa told Paul, in a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian? coming close but not committing (v. 26:28). Is your repentance bearing real fruit in your life, and have you truly committed to Christ, or are you, like Agrippa, lingering close without deciding? Where do you need to move from almost to fully?
9. God brought Paul safely through storm, shipwreck, and trial to Rome, where the book ends with Paul proclaiming the kingdom of God with all boldness and without hindrance (vv. 27-28; 28:30-31). What does this triumphant ending teach about God's sovereign providence and the unstoppable advance of the kingdom of God?
10. This is the final lesson in our journey through Acts, the birth and advance of the Lord's church and the spread of the gospel of the reigning Christ. Looking back over the whole

book, name one specific way the Lord has been forming you through this study, and what is one step you will take to carry the unhindered gospel forward in your own life.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Colossians 1:13-14, transferred from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God's beloved Son; 2 Corinthians 6:1-2, now is the favorable time, now is the day of salvation; Ephesians 1:11, God working all things according to the counsel of His will; Matthew 3:8, bearing fruit in keeping with repentance; Daniel 2:44, the kingdom of God that shall never be destroyed and shall stand forever