

(Through the Bible) Acts 28

by Chuck Smith

In Acts 28, Paul concludes his journey to Rome, demonstrating faith through healing and teaching about the hope of Israel amidst challenges and mixed responses from the people.

Duration: 44:45

Topics: "Faith In Christ", "Godly Approval"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the story of Paul's shipwreck and arrival on the island of Malta. Paul, known for his active nature, joins in gathering sticks to build a fire for warmth. The speaker emphasizes the importance of belief in Jesus Christ as the Messiah and the power it gives believers to become children of God. The sermon also highlights the fickle nature of worldly adulation and encourages listeners to seek God's approval rather than the approval of others.

Transcript

Tonight we'd like to just go through the 28th chapter of Acts and finish this book so that next Sunday night we move into the first two chapters of Romans. And so that's your reading assignment for next week, the first two chapters of Romans. But tonight, this fascinating, interesting final chapter to the story of the beginning of the Church and the ministry of Paul the Apostle.

Now, you remember last week we were left in a very exciting and dramatic place. Paul was on the ship that was being torn up by the waves. Those that could swim went first to shore, the rest of them grabbed logs or planking that was being torn off the ship, and they floated on into the beach.

As Paul had declared, all of the souls would be saved, though the ship would be destroyed. So, verse 1, and when they were escaped, that is from the ship that was being destroyed by the waves, then they knew that the island was called Melita, or the island known today as Malta, which is south from Sicily. And so the ship finally ended here at the island of Malta, having been driven by the storm for 14 days.

And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness. Now, this translation barbarous is sort of unfortunate because of our use of the word today barbarian. The Greek language, the word is barbar, and the Greek called anybody who couldn't speak Greek a barbar, because your language sounds so funny.

It isn't the beautiful flowing Greek language, and so if you spoke English, you were a barbar. You know, just it was their sort of slang term for someone who didn't speak Greek, and thus was not cultured, and

thus he was known as a barbar, or a barbarian, as came to be known, or here translated, the barbarous people. But really, just the natives of Malta, the native people on Malta, they were not really barbarians, but just native people of Malta, showed us no little kindness, for they kindled a fire and received us, everyone, because of the present rain and because of the cold.

Now, there was still this storm raging that they had been enduring for 14 days and 14 nights, and now they've had to come through the surf. It's winter time. The Mediterranean is cold.

They came up on the beach, some of them holding on to planks, some of them swimming to shore, and so the natives there built a fire for them so they could warm themselves and sort of dry out, and when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks. Now, this gives us, I think, a very interesting insight into Paul. He's the kind of a fellow who just couldn't sit still.

You know, he had to always be doing something. Paul was a doer, so they're building a fire, so he, rather than just letting the people gather and build the fire for him, he has to join in and go out and gather a bundle of sticks to throw onto the fire. He was just the kind of a guy that had to always be doing, and he laid them on the fire, and there came a viper out of the heat and fastened on his hand.

That would be a poisonous snake or perhaps, well, whatever, and when the barbarians saw the poisonous beast hanging on his hand, they said among themselves, oh, no doubt this man is a murderer, whom though he has escaped the sea, yet vengeance or the gods will not allow him to live, and so Paul, gathering the wood, throwing it into the fire, this viper jumps out and fastens itself onto Paul's hand, and immediately the natives, recognizing that poisonous viper, figured, hey, hey, this guy must really be a murderer, some serious crime that God's not allowing him to live, and so he shook off the beast in the fire and felt no harm. Again, insight into Paul, he didn't start screaming and yelling for help or anything, he just shakes the thing back off into the fire and makes no big deal over it. Howbeit, as they stared at him when he should have swollen up or fallen over dead suddenly, but when they had looked for a long time and they saw that no harm had come to him, they changed their minds and they said, this man's a god.

It, to me, shows how foolish it is for us to seek the fickle adulation of the world. They may look at you in one moment as a murderer and the next moment as a god, or it can be the other way around. They can look at you as a god, as a hero, but then the next day as a goat.

Some of the greatest sports heroes, when they go into a slump, find how fickle is the adulation of the crowd, and they get up to bat and they're used to hearing the cheers and the whistles and the screaming, you know, of adulation. Let them go into a prolonged slump, and every time they step up, they hear the boos and the hisses of the crowd. How fickle is the glory of the world.

And so the scripture exhorts us not to seek the glory of man, the approbation of the approval, but let's really seek the glory of God, His approval. Now, in the same place there in Malta were the possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and lodged us for three days courteously. Now, it is interesting to me, again, how that the Lord is sort of watching over Paul.

True, he is a Roman prisoner, but the centurion took an immediate liking to Paul, the one who was in charge of bringing him to Rome, and showed him many favors. Now he is shipwrecked on the island and the natives treat them with great kindness. And now the leader, the head man of the island, receives them into his house and treats them very courteously.

And it came to pass that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux. Now, Luke is a physician, remember, and so he's giving you a diagnosis of the fellow's illnesses. Whom Paul entered in and prayed and laid his hands on him and healed him.

So when this was done, others also which had diseases in the island came and were healed, who also honored us with many honors. And when we departed, they loaded us down with such things as were necessary. And so the treatment that they received on the Maltese people, his healing powers through Paul the Apostle.

Now, after three months, they spent then the rest of the winter months there on the island of Malta. But after three months, we departed in a ship of Alexandria, another one of these wheat ships that took the grains from Egypt to Rome. And so they caught another ship of Alexandria, which had wintered there in the island, whose sign was Castor and Pollux, the twins.

And so we landed at Syracuse and there we stayed for three days. And from there we fetched a compass and we came to Regium. And after one day, the south wind was blowing.

So we came the next day to Puteoli, which was the major cargo port from the east to Rome. North of that, of course, was the harbor of the Roman Navy, which could be seen from Puteoli. And Paul was probably impressed with the Roman naval might as he could see those ships from there.

Now, when we found brethren there and they desired that we stay with them for seven days and then we went toward Rome. And from there, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as the forum and the three taverns. Now, the forum was 43 miles from Rome and the three taverns is 33 miles from Rome, whom when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage.

You know, no matter where you go in the world, if you can find a body of believers, suddenly you feel at home and you feel strengthened and encouraged. My wife and I have had the privilege of traveling into some pretty remote places, but whenever we gather together with believers, we just suddenly feel at home. There's just the warmth of God's love and you realize that we're among friends.

We're among the family of God. We went out into a village in New Guinea, near Garoka or near Okorumpa, actually. And in this village, the village chieftain had prepared a marvelous feast for us of their native foods, which we found for the most part quite delightful.

There was some that was sort of unpalatable, but for the most part, it was quite delightful. And it was quite interesting because only the dignitaries were allowed within the fenced yard area where they had dug this pit that they called the mumu and had cooked this meal for us on banana leaves over hot rocks and covered over with six inches of dirt and this oven that they had made in the ground. And they had a bamboo shoot down inside and every once in a while, one of the natives would pour a cup of water down in and it would steam and the food that came out of it was really delicious.

And the rest of the village were all outside the fence looking in, watching us as we ate there. And of course, there were some of the natives with these big palms fanning the flies off of the food that was set out on the table. And they gave you a banana leaf and you had to put the food on the banana leaf and you ate it with your fingers.

And it was quite an experience for us. At the end of the dinner, the chieftain came up to me and he had some spears. In one hand, he had a translation of the Bible in his own language, in the other hand.

And he said, before the white man came and brought us this, holding up his translation of the New Testament, he said, we used to use these to kill men. But he said, now that I have this holding up again, his translation of the Bible, he said, I don't need these anymore. I want to give them to you.

And he gave me these spears that they had used in their fights to kill one another, not needing them anymore because they had the word of God now. And I'll tell you, my heart was bonded to that primitive chieftain. We embraced each other and just cultures apart.

Yet there was a bond between us, for there is neither Jew nor Greek, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, but Christ is all and in all. And there was this bond between us and my heart was bonded to him as I could feel his heart bonded to me. And it was just a beautiful experience.

I felt right at home among these people because I realized they're all a part of the family of God. And so here is Paul on his way to Rome, a prisoner of the Roman government. And yet, as he meets the brethren who came all the way out from Rome on the way there to meet him, his heart was warmed.

He was comforted when he saw the brothers. I'm at home among the family of God. Now, when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard.

But Paul was allowed to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him. So Paul was allowed to dwell in his own house. He was able to pay his own way.

And there were soldiers that were with him constantly and chained to him. He was in bonds. And yet he was not put in the common prison in bonds, but was allowed a certain amount of freedom, only always chained, as much freedom as you can have chained to a Roman soldier.

And so it came to pass that after three days, Paul called the chief of the Jews together. And then when they were come together, he said to them, men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people or the customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem to the hands of the Romans, who, when they had examined me, would have let me go because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spoke against it, I was constrained or I was forced to appeal to Caesar, not that I have anything to accuse my nation of.

So Paul is wanting to assure the Jewish leadership in Rome that he is not there to speak against the nation of Israel. That is not his purpose. He is there because of this political situation, and he had to make his appeal.

And but he wants to assure them that he's not going to be making any derogatory accusations against the nation. And for this cause, therefore, I've called you to see you and to speak to you because it's for the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain. Now, the hope of Israel, of course, was the hope of the coming Messiah.

That is still the hope of Israel that the Messiah might come. And it is for this hope, Paul said, I am bound with this chain. And they said unto him, we did not receive letters from Judea concerning you.

And neither any of the brethren that came showed us anything about you or spoke any harm against you. But we want to hear from you what you think concerning this sect, which we know that everywhere is spoken against. What do you think about this sect, this Jesus that they're talking about? And so Paul appointed them a day and many came to him to his lodging, to whom he expounded and testified the

kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets from morning till evening.

So a great number of the Jews gathered together at Paul's lodging there. And Paul began to go through their scriptures, pointing in their scriptures to the promised kingdom, pointing in their scriptures to the promised king. For you cannot have a kingdom without a king.

And he no doubt showed to them those many prophecies, not only relating to the kingdom of God and the glory of that kingdom of God, but of the king that would come and reign over the kingdom of God. For that king was to be born in Bethlehem. And thou Bethlehem, though thou be little among the provinces of Judah, yet out of thee shall come he who is to rule my people Israel, whose going forth have been from old, even from everlasting.

And so the eternal one would come to rule over the people of Israel, and he would be born in Bethlehem. And he would be born to a virgin, because God said in Isaiah seven, I will show you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel.

But at his birth, there will be great mourning by Rachel, because her children have been killed. Even as Herod ordered the death of all of the children two years old and under, attempting to destroy Jesus. And then he went on, no doubt, to tell them the other scriptures, that this child that was born was actually God's son that was given to man.

For unto us a child is born, but unto us a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. And of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end.

Upon the throne of David to order it and establish it in righteousness and in judgment from henceforth even forever. A son is given, his name to be called the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. And he shall sit upon the throne of David.

And so Paul rehearsed to them the kingdom of God and that king that was to come. In Daniel, the angel said unto him in chapter nine, there are seventy-sevens determined upon the nation of Israel. But from the time that the commandment goes forth to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, unto the coming of the Messiah, the Prince, shall be seven sevens and sixty-two sevens, or 483 years.

And he probably pointed out to them that it was 483 years from the time that Artaxerxes gave the commandment to restore and rebuild Jerusalem to the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, coming as Zacharias said he would, riding on a donkey. Behold, rejoice, O daughters of Jerusalem. Shout for joy, for behold, thy king cometh unto thee.

But he is lowly, he's sitting on a colt, the foal of an ass. And then he probably went on to show them how that he would be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver for Zacharias said and measure the price for which I was prized of them. And they measured thirty pieces of silver, a good price of which I was prized of them.

And I said, cast it to the potter in the house of the Lord. And Paul again pointing out their scriptures and then sought to persuade them that Jesus was the king that was promised. He fulfilled all of these prophecies.

He was born of a virgin in Bethlehem. Herod ordered the death of the babies at that time and on down the line he was betrayed. He was numbered with transgressors in his death.

He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. And Paul going down their scriptures sought to persuade them that Jesus was the king. And some believe the things which were spoken and some believe not always.

That's the result of the preaching of the gospel. Some believe, some believe not. And tonight as we have gathered together here, we gather together in two companies.

Those who believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, as the Lord and Savior, as the king that God had promised, and those who believe not. But as many as believed, to them gave he the power to become the sons of God, even to those who believed upon his name. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

So what I believe is important, my destiny hangs upon it according to the scriptures. And some believe and some believe not. It might be well if you ask yourself the question, in which of the two categories do I stand? You see, they were all exposed to the same truth, the same proofs.

Some of them believe, some of them believe not. I am not really free to speculate why they did not believe, but most often people do not believe because of presuppositional prejudice. They do not honestly evaluate the evidence, but look at it through the biased mind of presuppositional prejudice.

They have heard so long, the critics, the skeptics, as they assailed the person of Jesus, that without making an honest evaluation of the evidence, they have drawn their conclusions. All they have listened to really are the enemies of Jesus Christ. If you want to know the truth about me, the ones to ask would be my wife.

And my children. My wife is very frank and very honest and she'll tell you the truth about me. I'm probably not the person that you really think I am.

So many times people look at the person who stands behind the pulpit and somehow you get a, oh, perfect kind of a, ooh, you know, look at that, perfect. But she'll tell you different. But there are those who, for their own reasons, dislike me.

And I've heard all kinds of interesting stories about me from people who for some reason or other didn't like me. I've heard some pretty wild stories, stories for which there is no foundation of fact whatsoever. Some guy was actually going around the country a while back telling people that the Illuminati had given me \$8 million to start Maranatha Music so I could corrupt Christian young people.

And that he was a witch of the, you know, the one of the high 13 grand council of rich witches. And he was the one who delivered the money to me. My wife went up to Pasadena one night where he was speaking in church when he started off on this wild tale.

As I told you, my wife is straightforward. She stood up in the church. She said, that's not true.

You never did give Chuck Smith that money. And the guy looked rather startled. And she said, I know because he's my husband and everybody sucked in their breath in the church that night.

He then began to fumble around and he said, well, I gave it to his assistant. I always figured there was something with Romaine that he wasn't telling me because somehow it never got from Romaine to me, but listening to a person's enemies is not the way to discover truth. You should listen to what their friends, their closest associates have to say about them.

If you want to know the truth about Jesus, you should read the gospel of John. You should read the gospel of Matthew. These men who spent three days with him almost 24 hours a day, continuously over a three-year period, find out what they have to say about him, their attitudes towards him, their observations of him.

And there you'll get a more honest report. It's sad that people have made their determinations on the basis of false evidence or incomplete evidence without thoroughly examining for themselves. And that is why some believe not.

They haven't really made a thorough evaluation, but their minds were already made up beforehand. They had already formed their conclusions before examining the evidence. And thus they only looked at the evidence with a biased mind, not with an open mind.

And so they believe not because they have chosen to believe not. Not because there isn't ample evidence to prove, but because I've chosen not to believe. It is sad that people have made that choice without examining evidence.

I would encourage you, examine the evidence. It can stand up to close scrutiny. I have examined the evidence and I'm of that class that believe.

And some believed and I believe with all my heart that Jesus Christ is indeed the King that God promised would come. And that he fulfilled those prophecies of the Old Testament that spoke of the servant of God being despised and rejected, wounded for our transgressions. But that those other prophecies of the King who will come and establish the kingdom of God and will bring God's kingdom to the earth.

And we will see the earth restored as God intended it to be. We will see the deserts becoming a lush garden, roses breaking out in the desert streams and dry places. We'll see the abolishing of war and of crime.

We'll see the end of suffering and pain. We'll see the end of physical handicaps as the lame will leap for joy and the dumb will be singing praises unto God. I believe that that King is coming again and I believe that it is very soon.

And I believe it is the very same Jesus who was prophesied of the scriptures, the stone which the builders set at naught, the same has become the chief cornerstone. And when he comes again he will indeed be the chief cornerstone and the Jews and the Christians will be united together in their worship of the Messiah. There are not two Messiahs coming, there is one Messiah coming.

And he is coming to reign over the earth and we shall live and reign with him in his kingdom. And so when they agreed not among themselves, they departed after Paul had spoken one further word. He said, very well did Isaiah the prophet or did the Holy Spirit by Isaiah the prophet say unto our fathers.

Now notice here that Paul recognizes that the Holy Spirit is indeed the inspiration behind the scriptures. He writing to Timothy later said all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for a rebuke and

reproof. Now here Paul recognizes the Holy Spirit as the author of scripture.

Well did Isaiah speak by the Holy Spirit saying go unto this people and say, hearing you will hear and will not understand, seeing you will see and not perceive. For the heart of this people is wax gross, their ears are dull of hearing and their eyes have they closed. Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and be converted and I should heal them.

And so Paul then said unto them, having quoted from their own prophet Isaiah, be it known therefore unto you that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles and that they will hear it. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had great reasoning among themselves. And Paul dwelt for two whole years in his own rented house and received all those that came to him preaching the kingdom of God and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

Now we see some interesting things here that we must make note of. Number one, Paul being cast up on the island of Malta. No doubt God's hand was in that because God wanted to bring the message of salvation to those on the island of Malta.

Now to Paul, it looked like a great tragedy being shipwrecked, having to swim to shore the peril of his life. But yet God was using that disaster to bring his truth to these people. Paul, while he is here in Rome, sitting in this prison for two years, spent his time witnessing to those that came to him, but also writing some of his New Testament epistles.

Had it not been for this imprisonment, we today probably would not have the epistle to the Ephesians, which Paul wrote from this prison cell or the epistle to the Philippians or the epistle to the Colossians or the little epistle to Philemon. For Paul wrote all of these during this two year imprisonment time in Rome. The book of Acts closes about the year 63.

Paul wrote second Timothy in the year about 66. So Paul was probably freed after his appearance to Nero in writing second Timothy. His second letter to Timothy just before he was back in prison in Rome.

When he wrote his epistle to Timothy in 66 AD and in writing his epistle to Timothy, he makes mention that he left Trofimus sick at Melita. Now, when Paul was returning to Jerusalem before this particular imprisonment, Trofimus was with him and went with him from Melita to Jerusalem. In fact, it was Trofimus who was with Paul in the temple when the Jews got all excited and said, hey, this guy's brought Gentiles into the temple.

It was Trofimus that was with Paul there in the temple at the time of Paul's arrest by the Romans and being beaten by the Jews. And so it is writing to Timothy. It must be that Paul went back to Ephesus, back to Melita.

And that time when he left, Melita had to leave Trofimus there because he was sick, as he mentions in his last letter, the second epistle to Timothy chapter four. It would be well for you with this background of Paul in jail in Rome, the last chapter of Acts, it would be well for you to this week read the epistles of Ephesians, Colossians and the Philippians. Paul talks about a prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He talks about a prisoner for your sake, and he speaks much about his bonds. And yet he speaks of the rejoicing, the glorious rejoicing always in the Lord. And so it would be well to read Paul's prison epistles that were written during this time.

Why is it that Luke stopped his record here? Why didn't Luke tell us of the future of Paul? Why is it that we have to look to men like Eusebius and other early historians to find out what happened to Paul after this imprisonment? If you go back in the book of Acts to chapter one, as Jesus is promising the Holy Spirit to the early church or to the apostles, he said, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you shall be witnesses of me both in Jerusalem and in Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. Paul has now come to Rome, the heart of the world and from Israel, one of the uttermost parts. And so the fulfillment of the prophecy of Christ is complete.

And Luke does not see any necessity of carrying the record any further than just here in Acts. The words of Christ have been fulfilled and the gospel, which began in Jerusalem, spread through Judea and then by Philip into Samaria and then by Paul and Barnabas to others to the uttermost parts of the earth, has been fulfilled at this time. And Luke feels that that is sufficient.

We've covered the story of the spreading of the gospel into the world during that first century of the church's history. And so this comes to the end of church history from a biblical standpoint, except that as we get into the book of Revelation later on, we'll find John writing at a later period of history, some almost 30 years after these events and the close of the canon of New Testament scriptures. And so again, I encourage you, along with Romans one and two for next Sunday, do read Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and the little epistle of Philemon to get a picture of Paul and some of the attitudes and all during the time of this Roman imprisonment as he used this time to minister unto the church.

Shall we pray? Father, we thank you again tonight for the privilege of having your word, of studying your word. And Lord, we're so excited as we see your word fulfilled, as we see those prophecies fulfilled by Jesus Christ and as we see the prophecies of the temple that is to be built in our days or in the last days, if we live to that. Lord, we're so excited to see men who have upon their hearts that yearning for the temple to be rebuilt, the place of worship restored.

Father, we just thank you for, again, the confirmation of your word in the hearts of men. We ask your blessing and your peace upon Jerusalem, Lord, in these difficult times with the highly volatile situation that exists. Lord, we pray that you would bring peace to this troubled area.

And as the nation now, Lord, is sort of stunned by the resignation of Prime Minister Begin, we ask, Lord, that you would just really bring into office that man that you please. Lord, I pray for Prime Minister Begin. I ask, Lord, that you would minister strength to him, encourage his heart, lift him up, Lord.

I thank you for the courage and the strength and the guidance that this man brought to Israel. And Lord, I do pray that you will handpick his successor, that you might lead these people in these perilous times and in these momentous decisions that are being made for the future and the security of that land. Lord, we know that that which you have purpose shall surely come to pass.

And if there is anything, Lord, that you would have us to do in the fulfilling of your purposes, speak to our hearts, lay it upon our hearts, that we might be obedient, Lord, unto you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Again, we request that you pray for us the next couple evenings as we're up in Seattle, and that God would work in a very special way as we meet with the people up there, that God will just anoint our hearts, put his word upon our hearts for those people, and that it might be a time of spiritual blessings for them as we bring them the word of God. God bless you, give you a glorious week, surround you with his love, fill you with his spirit, and cause your heart to overflow with his joy. In Jesus' name.

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