



SERMON NOTES

US N^o. 129

Date: February 2nd, 2013

Title: Go the Distance

#37 in the Series on the Acts of the Apostles

1. On Malta

- a. The sailors didn't at first recognize Malta because most traffic passed the main port on the other side of the island.
- b. The natives were hospitable to the shipwrecked people; Malta was originally settled by Phoenicians and means "*refuge*" as it was formerly a refuge to the Phoenicians, especially in stormy weather, in their long voyage from Tyre to Gades.
- c. Paul gathers wood and is attacked by a viper; "*fastened to his hand.*" Although Paul was faithful to God and living as a true servant, this did not keep him from this trial.
- d. The "*justice*" referenced here is to the Greek goddess of justice, "*Dikee.*" The natives, knowing Paul was a prisoner, assumed he committed a great crime, and the goddess of justice would not permit Paul to escape unpunished. But Paul lives without any side effects, so the natives begin to believe that he is a god.
 - i. This is a typical human reaction; Paul had to be seen in extremes. Either he was terribly evil or considered a god. This is all the more reason we must be cautious about what others think of us, either for good or bad.
- e. The sick "*leading citizen,*" "*is the exact technical term for the person who represented Rome in that place; it is another example of Luke's extraordinary accuracy.*" (Boice) Some think this was a malady known as *Malta fever*, which comes from a microorganism found in the milk of Maltese goats. Its symptoms usually last about four months.
- f. Power Encounter – others on the island come afterwards and also find healing.
 - i. The phrase "*were healed*" is an interesting the Greek word, "*therapeuo*" and means "*to wait upon menially,*" and used figuratively to adore God, or specifically to relieve of disease.
- g. At the end of 3 months, Paul and his company were restored and honored by the natives.

2. On to Rome

- a. From Malta to Syracuse (home of Archimedes), Rhegium, and to Puteoli where they stayed 7 days with the Christian community there. What an attractive picture of the worldwide network of support and encouragement that Christians know.
- b. The Roman believers honored Paul by greeting him as the emperors were greeted when they arrived at Rome: they went out to meet him as he came into the city, traveling a full day's journey to the Appia Forum to do it (about 43 miles or 69 kilometers). In light of the love and honor behind this greeting, Paul thanked God and took courage.
 - i. At the Forum of Appius, "*crammed with boatmen and stingy tavern-keepers*" (Horace Satires 1.5.3-6). Thus the hospitable welcoming of the Christians was especially sweet.

- ii. *“Luke is far from giving the impression that Paul was the first person to bring the gospel to Rome... the presence of those Christians - the brothers, as Luke calls them - provides evidence enough that the gospel had reached Rome already.”* (Bruce)
- iii. There were Jews from Rome present during Peter’s preaching on Pentecost so many years earlier (cf. Acts 2:10), so it is likely that there had been Christians from and in Rome from the beginning.
- iv. Christians today need support from one another, especially in prayer, if they are to *“take courage.”*
- v. **Yet**, during Paul’s second Roman imprisonment, he was left alone and forgotten (cf. 2 Tim. 4:9-16), meaning that either the Christians at Rome didn’t or couldn’t maintain their love and honor of Paul.

3. Rome

- a. Paul was under *“house arrest,”* a rented house according to Acts 28:30, yet he was constantly under the supervision of a Roman guard and most likely chained. The rotation of the guards gave him a constant supply of people to talk to. In Philippians 1:13, Paul writes how his gospel reached the palace guards of Rome. Despite being a prisoner, Paul had a genuinely captive audience.
- b. Paul his practice of going first to the Jews in every city that he came to. The Jewish community at Rome in mid-first century is estimated to have numbered forty to fifty thousand, most being slaves and freedmen. In only three days the leaders of the Jews in Rome came and met with him. Paul wanted them to know:
 - i. that he was innocent of any crime against the law or the Jewish people;
 - ii. that he brought no accusation to Cæsar against his own people;
 - iii. that he was a prisoner because of his belief in Israel’s Messiah, the hope of Israel. As the year 70 AD approached, time was running out before an unparalleled national calamity struck a Jesus-rejecting Israel. In 10 years or so it would be clear that Jesus was the hope of Israel, yet a hope that many of them rejected.
- c. Paul spoke of the kingdom of God, and showed how the Old Testament spoke of Jesus from morning till evening. In Jesus, God established a spiritual Kingdom that would take root in men’s hearts before it took over the governments of this world. Some of them were persuaded by the things which were spoken, but some disbelieved. Even the best teaching from the best apostle in the best circumstances could not persuade them.
 - i. Paul’s witness is a combination of continuous preaching and instruction. Making note of this distinction is important: preaching appeals to the will, calling for a decision, while teaching informs the mind, requiring growth in knowledge and understanding. Stott notes, *“all Paul’s preaching had a doctrinal content, while all his teaching had an evangelistic purpose.”*
- d. Those who preach the gospel really preach two messages. To those who respond to the gospel with faith, he is a messenger of life. However, to those who reject Jesus, the preacher adds to

their condemnation. *“To the one we are the aroma of death to death, and to the other the aroma of life to life.”* 2 Cor. 2:16

- e. Paul spends two years in Rome before his trial in Caesar’s court.
 - f. Paul likely continued his work as a tentmaker to supply the rent for his house (cf. Acts 18:1-2, 20:33-35). He also received all who came to him, for example a former convert of Paul’s who was a runaway slave named Onesimus (cf. Philemon 10); Paul him told to go back to his master Philemon.
 - g. While in Rome, he wrote the letters to the Ephesians, the Philippians, and the Colossians.
 - h. Apparently, Paul was acquitted of these charges and was by most estimates free for another four or five years until he was arrested again, imprisoned, condemned, and executed in Rome at the command of Nero in 66/67 AD. Many believe that Luke did not record Paul’s appearance before Cæsar because the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts were written to give the Roman court the background and facts of Paul’s case in his trial before Cæsar.
 - i. Through Paul, God shows that God’s man, fulfilling God’s will, cannot be stopped despite all kinds of difficulty which may come in the way. Even disbelief will not hinder the gospel. Matthew 22:1-14 is a good illustration of the Book of Acts. God prepared a feast for Israel, and invited them to come in the days of Jesus’ ministry, but they would not come. Then, He sent out a second invitation, after *“all things were ready.”* But they still did not come; instead, they killed God’s servants who brought the message of the feast. Finally, God invited all that would come, including Gentiles – but they could only come if they were clothed in the garments of Jesus.
4. Take aways
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