

Lesson 13 - 21 October 2012

Paul's Arrival at Rome

Lesson Scope: Acts 28

Lesson Focus

This lesson closes a gripping story that began at Jerusalem (Acts 1) and leaves off at Rome, the capital of the empire. Just after the Gospels record the life and death of Jesus, the Acts of the Apostles illustrates how men lived out His teachings. Paul enters the narrative as a main character in chapter 13 and retains an active role to the end.

The Rome of Paul's day was in the beginning stages of a long decline. Ruled by the despotic Nero, the citizen freedoms that had propelled Rome to world power were fast disappearing. Paul's unjust imprisonment illustrated this. Yet Christianity was more healthy under pressure than it would be in later years when Constantine made Christianity the state religion.

Paul avoided politics and focused on his calling of "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ" (28:31). Paul's imprisonment gave him time to receive visitors, to teach the Gospel, and to write epistles. It also gave him time to pray and ponder. Likely Paul looked back over the years and traced the hand of God shaping his life.

From the natural viewpoint, life may seem like an unassembled puzzle. But as believers yield to the Master's will, He works in them "that which is wellpleasing in his sight."

We need to emphasize the inevitability of surrender. "Every knee shall bow... and every tongue shall confess," but for many of them it will be too late for salvation. How much better to surrender voluntarily and cast ourselves on the Rock and be broken before the Rock falls on us and grinds us to powder.

When Christ calls us to surrender, the flesh looks at the sacrifice. But faith looks at the reward, which is always an hundred-

fold plus eternal life. Christ always gives much more than He takes.

Lesson Aim: To portray the blessings of a surrendered life.

Theme Verses: [Hebrews 13:20-21](#). Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Lesson Text:

"The ... People Sheaved Us No Little Kindness"

[Acts 28:1-10](#) ¹ And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. ² And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. ³ And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid *them* on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. ⁴ And when the barbarians saw the *venomous* beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. ⁵ And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. ⁶ Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god. ⁷ In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. ⁸ And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. ⁹ So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: ¹⁰ Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they

laded *us* with such things as were necessary.

"So We Went Toward Rome"

Acts 28:11-15 ¹¹ And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux. ¹² And landing at Syracuse, we tarried *there* three days. ¹³ And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli: ¹⁴ Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome. ¹⁵ And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.

"Teaching ... With All Confidence"

Acts 28:16-17 ¹⁶ And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him. ¹⁷ And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men *and* brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

Acts 28:23-24 ²³ And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into *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. ²⁴ And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

Acts 28:29-31 ²⁹ And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves. ³⁰ And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, ³¹ Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

Questions for Study

"The ... People Sheaved Us No Little Kindness"

1. How did God use a viper to build His kingdom?
2. How does surrender change adversities into blessings?
3. How will our surrender contribute to the healing of the sin-sick around us?

"So We Went Toward Rome"

4. What did Paul's brethren contribute to his life?
5. How does surrender to the Lord affect our courage?

"Teaching ... With All Confidence"

6. What interests consumed Paul's time and attention?
7. Why can we teach things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence?
8. How can we make the surrendered life attractive to others?

Analyzing the Passage

Barbarous (Acts 28:2) people were not uncivilized; they were foreigners or non-Greeks.

This was the second time people concluded that Paul was a god. At Lystra they had called him Mercurius and tried to sacrifice to him and Barnabas (Acts 14:8-18). This time his response is not recorded, but likely Paul raised the same objections.

The second ship from Alexandria (28:11) was probably also a grain ship from Egypt (Acts 27:6, 38) that had wintered at Malta. Castor and Pollux (Acts 28:11) were twin sons of the god, Jupiter, in Greek mythology. Supposedly they brought good fortune to mariners.

That Paul and his companions found brethren at Puteoli is significant. Obviously, the Gospel had already spread from Rome to this Italian seaport. Likely a church had been planted in Rome by Roman Jews who had gone to the Feast of Pentecost, heard Peter's preaching, and returned home with the Appiiforum and The three taverns (Acts 28:15) lay forty-three and thirty-three miles from Rome. That the brethren traveled this far to meet Paul shows their eagerness for his coming.

Principles and Applications

"The ... People Sheaved Us No Little Kindness"

1. A surrendered person sees what is positive in difficult circumstances (Acts 28:2, 10). The memory of faith recalls the good that God brought out of past trials. The eye of faith sees God's loving hand behind our present troubles. The heart of faith believes that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28). And then the response of faith obeys the command to "in every thing give thanks" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

2. Surrender allows us to remain calm in danger (Acts 28:3-5). When Paul saw the viper clamped on his hand, he calmly "shook off the beast into the fire." He knew that death could not separate him from the love of God, and he did not fear.

We too are "safe in the arms of Jesus," because, "whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

3. Surrender takes our focus off ourselves and allows us to find fulfillment in serving others (Acts 28:3, 8-9, 23). A carpenter volunteers to fix a brother's leaky roof. A young man gives his whole week's paycheck to the local brotherhood assistance offering. A young sister gives words of cheer and encouragement freely.

These all have been liberated from the bondage of selfishness to the freedom of service.

4. The prayers of the surrendered are effective (Acts 28:8). Sin separates us from God and makes our prayers meaningless. But if we deal with the sin, then "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

"So We Went Toward Rome"

5. Surrender allows the Lord to set the schedule (Acts 28:13, 14). Paul did not fret and fume at delays; he waited on the Lord. We can likewise be flexible and cheerful because our time is now the Lord's.

6. The surrendered person finds courage in fellowship with faithful brethren (Acts 28:14-15). Self-centeredness creates rivalry that drives wedges between those who should be support-

ing one another. As we crucify self, we will enjoy fellowship with other saints. When we see our brethren standing strong, it inspires our own courage.

"Teaching ... With All Confidence"

7. God gives the surrendered person opportunities to testify of his faith (Acts 28:23, 30-31). God wants us to build His kingdom by spreading the Gospel. If we sincerely pray, "Lead me to some soul today," He will faithfully answer our prayer.

8. A surrendered person can leave to the Lord the results of his spiritual labors (Acts 28:24, 29). By nature we want to see the fruits of our labors. We may be discouraged when all the seed we sow seems to fall on unfruitful ground. But a faithful servant persists in casting his bread on the waters, knowing it shall return after many days. He continues to serve, remembering that the "Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

Important Teachings

1. A surrendered person sees what is positive in difficult circumstances (Acts 28:2, 10).

2. Surrender allows us to remain calm in danger (Acts 28:3-5).

3. Surrender takes our focus off ourselves and allows us to find fulfillment in serving others (Acts 28:3, 8-9, 23).

4. The prayers of the surrendered are effective (Acts 28:8).

5. Surrender allows the Lord to set the schedule (Acts 28:13-14).

6. The surrendered person finds courage in fellowship with faithful brethren (Acts 28:14-15).

7. God gives the surrendered person opportunities to testify of his faith (Acts 28:23, 30-31).

8. A surrendered person can leave to the Lord the results of his spiritual labors (Acts 28:24, 29).

9. Surrendered persons experience the fulfillment of God's promises (Acts 28:1).

10. Surrender allows one to live in confidence despite the uncertainties of life (Acts 28:30-31).

Answers to Questions

1. How did God use a viper to build His kingdom?

God allowed the snake to bite His messenger, Paul; then He healed the snakebite. This miracle opened the door for Paul's ministry on the island.

Paul's deliverance from snakebite was a type of the Christian's deliverance from the old serpent, the devil.

2. How does surrender change adversities into blessings?

If we surrender control of our lives to the Master, we can trust His goodness. Setbacks that would bring rage and cursing from sinners instead bring praises from saints. They know the Master's grievous chastening yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

3. How will our surrender contribute to the healing of the sin-sick around us?

Our native selfishness hurts those around us. Surrender will cause us to follow Jesus and give up ourselves in service to others. We will be joyful, thankful, peaceful examples of righteousness. As men see our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven, they may yield themselves to the Great Physician.

4. What did Paul's brethren contribute to his life?

Paul was usually surrounded by unbelievers and enemies. These brethren were a haven and encouragement to him. Their transformed lives were living proof of the power Paul preached. No doubt Paul valued their judgment, and this accountability provided stability for him.

5. How does surrender to the Lord affect our courage?

Surrender to Christ releases us "who through fear of death were all [our] lifetime subject to bondage." When our eternity is secure, what on earth do we have to fear? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" In other words, "fear God, and there's nothing else to fear."

6. What interests consumed Paul's time and attention?

"Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching ... the Lord Jesus

Christ" lay at the core of Paul's mission. Thus he followed Christ in constantly reaching out to people—reasoning with the Jews in their synagogues or preaching to heathen Gentiles. He wrote letters to the churches and prayed for them without ceasing.

7. Why can we teach things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence?

Jesus Christ is eternal, so He cannot become outdated. He is all-powerful, so He will never disappoint true seekers. His salvation and His Spirit are universal, available to all men. He is unchanging, the same yesterday, today, and forever.

8. How can we make the surrendered life attractive to others?

We polish the beauty of the surrendered life by rejoicing in its blessings. A willing surrender with a focus on the earthly benefits and eternal rewards will be attractive to others. Wearing a smile, speaking cheerfully, and helping our neighbors will leave a positive impression. Happy families with well-trained children and satisfied youth appeal to observers.

Summarizing the Lesson

Jesus calls us to surrender everything to Him. The flesh winces and wonders, "Will the reward be worth this pain?"

But Jesus promised, "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matthew 19:29).

Research Guide

1. Meditate on the surrender of Christ and His reward (John 8:28, 29; Luke 22:39-46; Philippians 2:5-11).
2. In *Doctrines of the Bible*, read the chapter titled "Self-Denial."