

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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ROME, AT LAST!

Acts 28:11-31

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Today's message has three points:

- Believers encouraged Paul.
- Paul used every circumstance to share the Gospel.
- Paul did not give up.

We've been in the book of Acts for over a year. We took a few breaks for different things throughout the year, but I've stayed focused on it, and we are almost done. In the last few messages, we learned that the Apostle Paul was in trouble for some false charges against him. As a Roman citizen, he had the option of making an appeal to the highest possible ruler, Caesar, which he did. This meant he would have to go to Rome to make that appeal.

On the way to Rome, he was shipwrecked. In this message, Paul and the crew get on another ship after being stranded for three months.

BELIEVERS ENCOURAGED PAUL

SCRIPTURE: Acts 28:11-16

After three months, we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island—it was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. ¹² We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. ¹³ From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. ¹⁴ There we found some brothers and sisters who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. ¹⁵ The brothers and sisters there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these people, Paul thanked God and was encouraged. ¹⁶ When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

EXPLANATION: Paul and his shipmates wintered on the island of Malta and then caught a ride on another ship. Interestingly, the twin gods Castor and Pollux were from Greek and Roman mythology. It was common for their images to be on ships during those days as they were supposed to provide traveling mercies. Castor means “one who excels” and Pollux means “very sweet”. Castor and Pollux are the two eyes of the constellation Gemini which all sailors would have known.

I point this out to you because Luke would have found humor in these figureheads because they certainly didn’t save the previous ship from crashing. Luke likely found it ironic that these false gods were attached to their ship when it was the one true God who rescued them from certain death.

As they continued the journey, Paul and his companions were met and greeted by fellow Christians along the way. When they finally arrived in Rome, Paul was given some measure of freedom in that he was allowed to live in his own accommodations where he could receive guests. Before you get the idea that his imprisonment was a life of ease, you should know that he was likely chained to a guard at all times.

APPLICATION: The journey to Rome had been arduous, and Paul was likely tired. The Bible tells us that the visits from other believers encouraged him. Have you ever had a friend or a family member who was going through a rough time? Sometimes we think there is nothing we can do to help. I imagine these brothers and sisters in Christ thought the same thing. After all, what could they do for Paul? They had no power to release him from his imprisonment, but they offered him what hospitality they could. Some traveled great distances just to see him, and Paul found encouragement in these acts of kindness.

Every day, you and I have a choice. We can encourage, or we can discourage. All around us are people who are struggling. We have the opportunity to make their lives a little easier. We can encourage them with a smile, with a visit, a kind word, or a gift. Sometimes just our presence is a blessing. Who knows? Your actions may be the very motivation that someone else needs to continue to do the work of the Lord.

I also want to point out that by this time in Christian history, the Gospel had spread all over the place. It seems that wherever Paul went, he found fellow believers. And on this trip, believers went out of their way to be hospitable and to provide encouragement. Some were nearby, some came a long way. I've made trips to encourage people, and I am sure many of you have.

Think of it, the courageous Paul, the mighty Paul, the seemingly invincible, ever-energetic Paul. Yeah, that guy – you would think he would not need encouragement, but the scripture tells us he thanked God when he saw them.

Never underestimate the power of good, encouraging words spoken in a timely manner. We all need encouragement. The language of Christian encouragement is universal. It is the business of Christians to encourage other Christians.

PAUL USED EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE THE GOSPEL

SCRIPTURE: Acts 28:17

Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: “My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. ¹⁸ They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. ¹⁹ The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. ²⁰ For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.” ²¹ They replied, “We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. ²² But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.”

EXPLANATION: Paul was under house arrest. So, he could not go to the synagogue as was his custom. He could not address the Jewish leaders and share his conversion story in the traditional way. While Paul could not go to them, they could come to him. So, he wasted no time in extending invitations and gathering a crowd. Surprisingly, the Jewish leaders were curious enough to visit Paul and listen to what he had to say.

ILLUSTRATION: Charlotte Diggs Moon was born December 12, 1840 and died on December 24, 1912. You may recognize her better by the name of Lottie. Every year, during the month of December, Southern Baptist churches across America take up an offering in her name. The Lottie Moon offering is used to support international missions. While those of you who have been in church all your lives may recognize her name, many still do not know her story.

Lottie rejected Christianity in her early years, but after she graduated from college as one of the first Southern women to ever earn a master's degree, she gave her life to the Lord. And when she gave her life, she gave all of it. Lottie was from a wealthy family, but she left a life of relative ease to take on the burden and hardship of a life in ministry. A young man asked her to marry him, but Lottie gave up the idea of marriage and family in order to say yes to the work God had called her to do. After years of teaching in the states, she boarded a ship and set sail for China where she served as a missionary for about 40 years.

APPLICATION: Both Lottie and Paul could have made some really good excuses to avoid ministry:

- Lottie could have continued teaching underprivileged girls in the States, which was, in itself, a mission.
- She could have justified staying home by sending money instead of going herself.
- She could have reasoned that as a single woman, it was too dangerous for her to live in a foreign country alone.

Paul had already been through so much:

- He was almost killed when he was attacked by Jews.
- Then he was thrown into prison under false allegations.
- He suffered through a terrible storm at sea, was shipwrecked, and bit by a poisonous snake.
- Now he was chained to a soldier while he awaited trial in Rome.
- Nobody would have faulted Lottie or Paul if they had chosen the easier paths.
- No one would have criticized Paul if, upon reaching Rome, he had taken a little break, but as soon as his feet hit the ground, Paul was back to the races,

and he started with the very group of people who seemed to hate him the most.

Unfortunately, many American Christians are the exact opposite of Lottie and Paul. They spend their entire lives sitting on the couch, taking a break. They use every excuse to keep from sharing the gospel. “I cannot share the gospel with my neighbor; she may think I’m strange. I cannot work in that ministry; it would require that I give up a Saturday afternoon.” If it’s not easy enough, cheap enough, or convenient enough, many Christians just are not interested.

- Believers encouraged Paul.
- Paul used every opportunity to share the Gospel.

PAUL DID NOT GIVE UP

SCRIPTURE: Acts 28:23-31

They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. ²⁴ Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. ²⁵ They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet: ²⁶ “Go to this people and say, “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.” ²⁷ For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’ ²⁸ “Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!” ³⁰ For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. ³¹ He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!

EXPLANATION: Once again, Paul explained the gospel. He tried to convince the Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah, but again, most of them failed to believe. Paul ended his presentation with a proclamation. God’s chosen people might reject the Messiah, but the Gentiles would not.

ILLUSTRATION: Annie Walker Armstrong was born on July 11, 1850. She became a Christian when she was 19 years old and was instrumental in the creation and development of the Women’s Missionary Union. For many years, she paid for her own expenses as she traveled extensively promoting missions. Today, many churches take up an annual Easter offering for home missions in her name.

Both Annie Armstrong and Lottie Moon were extraordinary women who devoted their lives to the Lord’s work in very different ways. Like Paul, they overcame significant challenges to do so. Annie and Lottie were born and raised in a time when women did not have significant public leadership roles. While they tried to spread the gospel, the world around them—including their Christian brothers and sisters—argued over whether women should even be serving in this type of ministry. However, rejection, criticism, and even hardship did not deter them from the path to which they felt called. Perhaps they took their cues from the life of Paul.

Persecution did not stop Paul. Prison did not stop Paul. Ridicule did not stop Paul. Paul was persistent. When the Jews rejected the Gospel message, he continued to speak to anyone who would listen. He spoke to the guards who were chained to his side. He spoke to the people who came to his door. Through letters, he spoke to the churches he had helped establish. He used every opportunity he was given to promote Christ.

In 2020, our denomination had 47,592 churches and reported 123,160 baptisms. That averages to about 2-3 people who came to know the Lord in each church and were baptized. I realize that 2020 was a unique year, but in 2019 it was only 5-6 people per church. Think about that for a minute, and let it sink in. In recent years, each church in our denomination has been responsible for only 2-6 people coming to know the Lord. I am glad that on average our churches reached 2-6 people, but if our primary purpose as Christians is to reproduce, we are not doing a very good job. With all of the resources, freedom, and comfort that we have, we are often seeing less growth than our persecuted brothers and sisters in foreign countries. There are a lot of factors that contribute to those numbers, and we can come up with a lot of excuses. But can I just suggest that ultimately the fault has to fall squarely on our shoulders? The reason more people are not coming to know Christ is

because we are not taking every opportunity to tell people about him. Let's use the formula described in this section of Acts 28.

- Believers encouraged Paul. We can encourage others.
- Paul used every opportunity to share the Gospel.
- Paul did not give up.

APPLICATION: Let me ask, if you are a believer, do you have a reason for not sharing the good news of Jesus Christ? God may not have asked you to serve in foreign missions, but he has called each and every one of us to be a missionary. One of the women I told you about went overseas, the other stayed in America. Paul was able to do what he did, in part, because of the Christians who came along beside him, encouraging him, providing for his needs. It is not a matter of being called. If you are a believer, you have been called. What are you doing with that calling?

If you don't know Jesus as Lord and Savior today, I strongly urge you to trust him as Savior and Lord, repent of your sins, be baptized, and follow his leading in your life.

INVITATION: The altar is open. Consider whether you need to come forward and pray. Maybe you need to ask God to forgive you for allowing the things of this world to crowd out your desire to share the Good News. Maybe you need to pray for courage to speak boldly to your lost loved ones. You may need to pray that you love enough to care. Or maybe, you cannot speak about the Gospel because you do not know the Gospel. If you do not have a personal relationship with the Christ that Paul knew so well, I encourage you not to wait another day. Come to the altar. I would love to pray with you and share more about Jesus and the salvation he offers you.

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