

PAUL IN ROME: A STRATEGY FOR EVANGELISATION IN THE GREAT CITY

ACTS 28:16–31

Introduction

The last words of the great book of *Acts* centre upon evangelism, Paul's strategy for reaching the great city of Rome for Christ.

- I. Paul entered Rome as a prisoner (v. 16).
- II. Step 1: an explanatory meeting with the religious leadership (vv. 17-22).
- III. Step 2: a clear proclamation of the message (vv. 23-24).
- IV. Step 3: a turning to those who would receive the gospel, the Gentiles (vv. 25-29).
- V. Step 4: a mission of continued evangelism (vv. 30-31).

I. *Acts 28:16 Paul, A Prisoner in Rome*

Paul entered Rome as a prisoner. The other prisoners were turned over to the proper officer of the Roman guard. Paul was allowed to secure private housing for himself and allowed to have guests as he willed (vv. 16, 23, 30). This was probably due to the letter from Festus and King Herod Agrippa (Acts 25:13f) and a recommendation by Julius because of the help and cooperative spirit of Paul along the journey to Rome (Acts 27:1f). Paul was, however, placed under house arrest, being chained by the wrist to a soldier twenty four hours a day.

Thought 1. Note the providence of God in overruling the normal affairs of men. His messenger, in a private house, would be able to proclaim the gospel to all who visited him.

II. *Acts 28:17–22 Witnessing and Evangelisation*

The first step in evangelizing the city was an explanatory meeting with the religious leaders. Paul was able to secure a house and settle down within three days. Note: despite the unbelievable ordeal of the last three months, he did not rest a single day. He launched right into his ministry of evangelism. Being under house arrest, he sent a request to all the Jewish leaders throughout Rome to meet him at an appointed time in his house. They would come, for Paul was well known for being the chief exponent and teacher of Christianity throughout the world. The Jews especially knew of him, for he had been one of the brightest stars of their nation until his conversion to Christ, and he was now the one who riled up the Jews so much wherever he went. They would come out of curiosity to see this man who had become such a controversial figure throughout the world, to see just what he had to say.

There were at least seven synagogues in Rome at this time. Just how many leaders from each attended the meeting is not known. Paul simply related what had happened

to him, why he had been arrested and why he was now to appear before Caesar. His purpose was...

- to remove the doubts and questions, rumours and prejudices they might hold against him. He wanted to share the gospel with them. Paul's heart ached for his own people and he always reached out to them first wherever he went. He had written to the believers earlier that his love for his own people was so deep he would give his own soul for their salvation (Rom 9:1-3; 10:1).

The Scripture in these verses show clearly what Paul says. Noting the points and referring to the events of the Scripture will explain them in detail (see *Trials of Paul*, Acts 28:17-22 for Scripture where each event is discussed).

Thought 1. Paul set at least three dynamic examples for us in these verses.

- 1) The example of dedication — an enormous dedication to reach people with the gospel, no matter what the circumstances or how exhausted one might be.

Mat 28:19-20 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Mark 16:15 He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”

Acts 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 4:20 “For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

2 Cor 4:13 It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak.

- 2) The example of love — an enormous love for one's own people, one's own nation. Paul never gave up on his people, no matter their ill treatment of him.

Rom 9:3 For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race.

Rom 10:1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.

- 3) The example of removing all doubts and questions, rumours and prejudices so that the gospel can have free course and flow freely as one proclaims it. (What an example for citywide evangelisation, when possible!)

ACTS 28: 17–22 TRIALS OF PAUL

Paul defended himself before (1) the Jerusalem mob (Acts 22:1-23); (2) the commander (Acts 22:24-30); (3) the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1-10); (4) Felix (Acts 24:10-23); (5) Festus (Acts 25:8-12); (6) King Herod Agrippa II (Acts 25:23-26:32); and (7) the Jews at Rome (Acts 28:17-28). □

III. Acts 28: 23–24 *Witnessing and Preaching*

The second step in evangelizing the city was a clear proclamation of the message. *Many* had come to the meeting to hear what Paul had to say. Apparently, the house was packed and overflowing. Note three significant points.

1. Paul preached the Kingdom of God.

=> He preached that Jesus is the true Messiah who had brought the Kingdom of God to earth.

Mat 9:35 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.

Mat 10:7 “As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’”

=> He preached that Jesus is the true Messiah who is to return to earth to establish the kingdom forever.

(See notes, Acts 1:6-7; Jesus Christ, Resurrection, Acts 2:24; note, Acts 2:25-26; Jesus Christ, Resurrection, Jn. 1:20; note, Jn. 1:23; Kingdom of God, Mt. 19:23-24.)

2. Paul focused his preaching in the Word of God, and there alone.

1 Cor 15:3-4 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

1 Th 2:13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

3. The results were mixed. Some were convinced, but most did not believe.

John 3:18 “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

John 3:36 “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”

John 8:24 “I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.”

IV. *Acts 28:25–29 Gospel, Rejected by the Jews and Received by the Gentiles*

The third step in evangelizing the city was turning to those who would receive the gospel — the rejected Gentiles. This is a most significant fact, a pivotal point of history: the book of *Acts*...

- opens with the great commission to carry the gospel to the Jew first (Acts 1:8).
- closes with the gospel being rejected by the Jews and being taken primarily to the Gentiles (Acts 28:28).

The fact that the Jews rejected the gospel in the city which symbolized the world (Rome) and rejected it as preached by the apostle to the world (Paul) is climactic. It is a picture of the gospel being rejected by the Jews worldwide and being taken to the Gentiles. Paul declared the fact upon the authority of God's Word, a fact that is tragic news to the Jew, but glorious news to the Gentile.

1. Paul declared that Isaiah prophesied the rejection of the gospel by the Jews (Isa. 6:9-10. See *Unbelief*, Jn. 12:39-41.) Note three points.
 - a. The unbeliever's rejection is wilful, always deliberate. He sees and hears, yet he refuses to really open his eyes and ears. He refuses to understand. But why? Why does a person act so illogically, rebel and refuse to understand? Christ says, "For this people's heart has become calloused" (v. 27). The Greek says "This people's heart has grown fat [overweight]." Being fat indicates sensuality and senselessness. To eat and eat, adding weight upon weight is living after the flesh and makes no sense at all. It is sensual and senseless. Christ is therefore saying that the unbeliever has become so sensual and senseless that he rebels and refuses to understand the mysteries of God. His sensuality is due to worldliness and to the lust for the things of the world (Rom 8:5-8; 1 Jn. 2:15-16), and his senselessness is due to being deceived by the evil one, the devil himself (2 Cor. 4:3-4).
 - b. The unbeliever's rejection is prophesied (Isa. 6:9-10; see Jn. 12:40; Acts 28:26f). A man who wilfully rejects God experiences a *judicial blindness and rejection* by God. The person who deliberately chooses to be blind and who rejects understanding is given over to a *just punishment*. His obstinate unbelief, constant sin, and continual rejection lead to a judicial blindness and to being rejected by God.

Rom 1:24, 26, 28 *Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another....Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones....Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. (See notes, Rom 1:24-32)*

Gen 6:3 *Then the Lord said, “My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.”*

Psa 81:11-12 *“But my people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices.”*

Prov 29:1 *A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed — without remedy.*

Hosea 4:17 *Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone!*

- c. Note also the clear description of the unbeliever’s rejection. No clearer or stronger description could be given (see v. 27).

Thought 1. Why do men reject Christ, hardening their hearts, deafening their ears and closing their eyes?

John 3:19 *“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.”*

2 Th 2:12 *And so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.*

Psa 52:3 *You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth.*

Prov 2:14 *Who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil.*

Thought 2. One of the most tragic sights in all the world is to see people sitting under the most glorious message and falling asleep, or being listless, inattentive, disinterested, or wilfully hardened and close-minded. God will *give them up* to their slumber and deliberate hardness (see note, Mt. 13:13-15).

Thought 3. What a person is fighting against is conversion and spiritual healing. If he listens and receives, he has to change his life, giving God all He is and has. Therefore, he rebels and rejects — deliberately. The person does not want to be turned “from darkness to light” (Acts 26:18).

2. Paul declared that salvation was being sent to the Gentiles, and they would hear it. Paul had been serving Christ for more than thirty years now. Everywhere he went, he attempted to bring the glorious message of salvation to the Jews first. What a dynamic and vibrant example of persevering love and undying hope! But how unfortunate this is: in the end of each mission and here at the end of his final mission journey, Paul was forced to turn to the Gentiles all alone! How often God had tried to appeal to the Jews to walk hand in hand with Paul among the Gentile nations, evangelizing all men everywhere (see *Israel, God’s Plan*, Jn. 4:22). But as always, the Jews left Paul when he mentioned the Gentiles, arguing and discussing what Paul had declared. Their decision was final; they wanted absolutely nothing to do with Paul and the Christ he preached.

V. *Acts 28:30–31 Paul's Faithfulness*

The fourth step in evangelizing the city was a mission of continued evangelisation. The Scripture is very clear, but note two significant facts.

1. Paul preached and taught, proclaiming the gospel and rooting the new believers in the faith. He gave systematic instruction and follow-up as well as evangelizing all with whom he came in contact.
2. The epistles tell us some of Paul's activities during these two years. He wrote the letters of Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. Luke accompanied Paul to Rome and remained with him for some time (2 Tim. 4:11), as did Timothy (Ph. 1:1; 2:19-30; Col. 1:1; Phile. 1); Tychicus (Eph. 6:21); Epaphroditus (Ph. 4:18); Aristarchus and Mark (Col. 4:10). Other outstanding Christian leaders also spent some time with him (Col. 4:10-14; Phile. 10-11, 23-24). He was constantly witnessing, and his witness spread around the world through the Praetorian Guard, the select troops of the palace. ■

ACTS 28:30–31 THE GOSPEL

Acts began with a few believers being commissioned to preach the glorious gospel at Jerusalem. This handful of believers was then to take the gospel in all Judea, then in Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth. Now, as Acts closes, the gospel has reached the centre and capital of the world, Rome itself. It is now being proclaimed by thousands throughout the whole world. Sometimes the message has flowed freely without opposition; at other times it has been threatened with a violent attempt to silence it. Sometimes the message has been silently counterfeited by false ministers and teachers who have infiltrated the church and were empowered by the *wicked one*. Sometimes the message has even been added to and at other times it has been subtracted from. But it has never been stamped out. The Word of the glorious God and of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ marches on triumphantly, and will continue to march on triumphantly until He returns. The Acts of God are not yet done. □