

KEEPING COMMITMENTS / Sunday School- August 29, 2010

Unifying Topic: UPHELD BY GOD

Lesson Text

I. Ministry During Hardship (Acts 28:16-22)

II. Making The Most Of The Opportunity (Acts 28:23-25)

III. God's Contingency Plan (Acts 28:28-31)

The Main Thought: And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him. (Acts 28:30-31, KJV).

Unifying Principle: People struggle to keep commitments. How can we hold to our commitments? In recognizing God's commitment and faithfulness to us, we are challenged to commit our lives to God's care.

Lesson Aim: To teach students how Paul continued to be committed to the Lord despite imprisonment and impending death.

Life aim: To teach believers how to stay committed to Christ no matter how difficult the circumstances or situations.

28:16 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.

28:17 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.

28:18 Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me.

28:19 But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of.

28:20 For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.

28:21 And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee.

28:22 But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.

28:23 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.

28:24 And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

28:25 And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,

28:26 Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive:

28:27 For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and 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 should be converted, and I should heal them.

28:28 Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

28:29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

28:30 And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,

28:31 Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

HISTORY:

Paul's voyage to Rome, a trip made at his own request, is a terrible journey that includes shipwreck, snake bites, and dangers of all kinds. God's messenger was shipwrecked, but God saved him and everyone else on the ship. There were terrible trials so threatening that only God could have saved His messenger. There was...

- the violent storm which mercilessly drove the ship under its own ferocious power for fourteen days (27:14)
- the utter hopelessness of the situation: everyone except Paul had lost all hope of being saved (24:20)
- the attempted abandonment of the ship by the sailors to save their own lives, dooming all passengers to shipwreck and death(27:30)

- the soldier's plan to kill all prisoners, including Paul to prevent their escape (27:42)

The point is that God promised to deliver Paul and God kept His promise. He always does. They had landed on the island of Malta or Melita. The natives were called barbarians, not because they were an uncivilized people, but that they did not follow Greek customs or speak the Greek language. All non-Greeks and non Romans were foreigners, a barbarous people. **28:1-10** ¹It was rainy and cold, as the shipwrecked travelers escaped onto this island. The natives showed kindness by kindling a fire and welcoming them. As Paul gathered sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper (snake) bit his hand. The natives reacted, "*No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow him to live.*" Paul shook off the viper and suffered no harm. After a time, the natives thought Paul was a "*god*" as no harm had come to him.

Note two very significant points:

1. God took care of Paul through the trial—healing him instantaneously.
2. God used the trial to reach many for Christ. The natives saw the delivering power of God, and by seeing His care for Paul, they were more ready to listen to the gospel. They would soon learn that God was the only true and living God.

God's messenger faced superstition and heathenism, but he was given a unique opportunity for evangelism.

- Men of every generation hold to some superstition and idolatry.
- Men cannot understand the miracles of God.
- The result of the miracle was directed by God.

In another incident, Publius, a leading citizen of the region, received and entertained the travelers "*courteously*" for three days. His father was sick with a fever and dysentery (*disease of the intestines, often resulting from poor sanitation*). Paul went in to him and prayed laying his hands on Publius' father and healed him. Others on the island with diseases came and were healed. The islanders honored Paul and others in many ways and provided the necessities for them as they departed the island. The point is that God used these trials—miracle of the snakebite, and prayer of healing to open the door of the island for Paul to minister and preach the gospel.

28:11-15 After three months of winter, an Alexandrian ship (the Twin Brothers) Castor and Pollux sailed from Malta.

²In Greek and Roman mythology, Castor and Pollux (known as Polydeuces to the Greeks) were twin brothers who appeared in several prominent myths. The twins were worshiped as gods who helped shipwrecked sailors and who brought favorable winds for those who made sacrifices to them. The Romans considered Castor and Pollux the patron gods of horses and of the Roman social order of mounted knights, called equites.

³In the myth the twins shared the same mother but had different fathers which meant that Pollux was immortal and Castor was mortal. When Castor died, Pollux asked Zeus to let him share his own immortality with his twin to keep them together and they were transformed into the Gemini constellation. The Romans believed that the twins aided them on the battlefield.

For though the unbelieving ancients would have attributed Paul's rescue to "*the Twins*" and taken it as a token of his innocence, Paul has made clear he belongs to, serves and believes in the One True God, who was his protector and deliverer. They sailed and landed at Syracuse (3days), then Rhegium (1day), and then to Puteoli. Paul found brethren at Puteoli and stayed with them seven days. As they traveled, brethren heard about them and met them at Appii Forum and Three Inns Taverns. This gave Paul courage and he thanked God.

LESSON:

Acts 28:16-22 Ministry During Hardship

28:16 Upon arrival at Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard. Paul entered Rome as a prisoner. The other prisoners were turned over to the proper officer of the Roman guard. Paul was however, placed under house arrest—a private house; being chained to the wrist of a soldier twenty-four hours a day. He was allowed to have guest as he willed. This was probably because he was a Roman citizen. Also, Festus and Captain Julius had said good things about him. He was to be brought before the proper authorities at an appointed time.

28:17 After three days, Paul never was one to waste time, he called the chief of the Jews together. **This was the first step in evangelizing the city**—an explanatory meeting with the religious leaders. Note: despite the unbelievable ordeal of the past three months or more, he rested for three day and then launched right into ministry

¹ http://executableoutlines.com/acts/acts_28.htm

² <http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/Ca-Cr/Castor-and-Pollux.html>

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castor_and_Pollux

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. 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 just 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. He needed to explain why he was a prisoner. His purpose was...

- to remove the doubts and questions, rumors 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. If he went to the Gentiles first, he would have alienated himself from the Jews. 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).

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.
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.
3. The example of removing all doubts and questions, rumors, and prejudices so that the gospel can have free course and flow freely as one proclaims it.

Paul had defended himself before:

1. The Jerusalem mob (Acts 22:1-23).
2. The Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1-10).
3. Felix (Acts 24:10-23).
4. Fetus (Acts 25:8-12).
5. King Herod Agrippa II (Acts 25:23—26:32).
6. The Passengers on the ship (Acts 27:24-30).
7. The Jews at Rome (Acts 28:17-28).

Paul declared his innocence and the injustice done. He had not violated Jewish law, and he had not injured Jewish people.

28:18 Therefore, he established that he had been taken before and was found innocent; and ⁴despite his innocence, he was still a prisoner in Rome. If the Romans didn't punish him, the leaders were likely to lead an insurrection against Rome. That was something Festus wished to avoid (Acts 24:9), so he had succumbed to the pressure of the Jewish leaders and kept Paul a prisoner.

28:19 Although Paul was innocent, the Jewish leaders kept up the pressure to the point that his only escape was to appeal to Caesar in the hopes of receiving a fair trial. Since he was a Roman citizen, he had the right to appeal his case to Rome. That led to his being transported to Rome. Since he had revealed that the Jewish leaders were responsible for his imprisonment, Paul was quick to point out that he was just defending himself against unfair accusations, and that in no way was he condemning or attacking the Jewish people or nation. He was not a traitor to the cause of Judaism. He remained Jewish in nationality and interest. He maintained his special love for the people. He held no bitterness toward Israel. He was just simply defending himself.

28:20 Paul says, "*For this cause...I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you...for the hope of Israel...*" Paul was saying, the reason I'm bound in chains was for the hope of Israel; the reason these chains bind me is that I'm preaching the hope of the Messiah—He is Savior, he rose from the dead, and He brings resurrection for all of us who believe. There is resurrection for the dead! Paul constantly referred to his chains. In Ephesians 6:20 he says, "*I am an ambassador in bonds.*" In 2 Timothy 1:16 he says, "*The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain.*"

28:21-22 "*And they said unto him, we neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren ...spoke any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest; for as concerning this sect [Christianity], we know that everywhere it is spoken against.*" No letter or message from Judea had arrived before Paul. The Jews in Rome

⁴ <http://www.biblebb.com/files/mac/sg1802.htm>

so he now hears knew nothing about his trial and had received no report from Judea about him. But they knew that he was a Christian. Christians were denounced everywhere by the Romans because they were seen as a threat to the Roman establishment. They believed in one God, whereas the Romans had many gods, including Caesar. The Christians were committed to an authority higher than Caesar. They had heard bad things about the "group" called Christians. So, they wanted to hear Paul's opinions. It was hard for Paul, but he wanted to preach the gospel in Rome, and he eventually got there in chains after being shipwrecked, and after many trials.

Acts 28:23-25 Making The Most Of The Opportunity

This was the second step in evangelizing the city—a clear proclamation of the message. **28:23** Many had come to the meeting to hear what Paul had to say. On that day it 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. He preached that Jesus is the true Messiah who is to return to earth to establish the kingdom forever.
2. Paul focused his preaching in the Word of God, and there alone.
3. The results were mixed. Some believed, but most did not believe.

Paul used both the Law of Moses and the prophets to teach the Jews that Jesus was the true Messiah, the fulfillment of God's promises. He showed them proof from the scriptures and labored long from morning till evening.

28:24 The simplicity of the gospel causes many to reason too much and therefore disbelieve, while others take it just as it is and believe. They did not believe many times before when Paul preached. It had happened at Paul's trial in Jerusalem (Acts 23:9). We now come to The third step in evangelizing the city—turning to those who would receive the gospel—the rejected Gentiles.

28:25 Unable to agree with one another, they were left with this final Word of warning from Paul by the Holy Spirit: "*Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers.*" And he continues to quote to verse 28. For the fourth time in Scripture the Spirit of God quotes a prophecy first recorded in Isaiah 6:9-10. Isaiah spoke those words at a time when Israel was in sin. Our Lord Jesus quoted him in Matthew 13:14-15 to pronounce judgment on Israel. John also quoted the same passage (John 12:40). Finally Paul quoted them in Acts **28:25-27**. Paul declared that Isaiah prophesied the rejection of the gospel by the Jews. They had chosen not to see or hear. So, they could not understand the message. They had rejected God's Messiah; they had rejected His message, and they had rejected salvation. Note three points:

1. The unbeliever's rejection is willful, always deliberate. He sees and hears, yet he refuses to really open his eyes and ears **28:26**. He refuses to understand. But why?
 - a. "*For the heart (the mind, the people's soul) is waxed gross (grown dense, dull, lost their feeling).*"
 - b. "*...and their ears are dull of hearing*" (heavy of hearing, hard of hearing).
 - c. "*...and their eyes have they closed*" (shut their eyes). The unbeliever's rejection is prophesied. A man who willfully rejects God experiences a *judicial blindness* and rejection by God. This person 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.
2. The unbeliever's rejection is clear, they:
 - a. hardened their hearts
 - b. deafened their ears
 - c. closed their eyes
 - d. denied what they saw
 - e. refused understanding
 - f. fought conversion and healing.

Paul did not waste time, but made the most of this opportunity. Anytime we give forth the gospel of Christ, it is not a waste of time but the greatest of opportunities to serve and be used by Christ. Although Paul was under house arrest, in chains, he had the opportunity to accomplish what he set out to do—to evangelize the gospel of Christ in Rome rather if they received it or not. The point is: they heard the gospel.

Acts 28:28-31 God's Contingency Plan

28:28 This is a pivotal point of history in the Book of Acts. It ...

- Opens with the great commission to carry the gospel to the Jew first (Acts 1:8; Rom.1:16).
- Closes with the gospel being rejected by the Jews and being taken primarily to the Gentiles (Acts 28:28).

Paul declared that salvation was now 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. However, the elect became reprobate, and the reprobate elect. He's saying the Gentiles will hear, signifying they will obey.

28:29 As always, the Jews left arguing and discussing what Paul had declared, their decision was final; they wanted absolutely nothing to do with Paul and the Christ he preached. ⁵It meant change. When God moved in ways different from what they had expected, even though he had predicted it, they refused to move with Him. They hung back and clung to their tradition and refused to be disturbed in the comfort of their lives. They did not want to be changed. We resist anything that disturbs the tranquility of an accepted and commonly practiced tradition. We want to cling to the comfortable dead rags of the past, even though the Word of God has always marked out the pathway by which the Spirit works. Because as God bypassed the Jews, so he bypasses any who continually refuse to move with the creative power and the advance of the Spirit of God. The Jews departed disputing among themselves.

28:30-31 Paul stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, with no freedom to leave, which brings us to: The fourth step in evangelizing the city—a mission of continued evangelism. The imprisonment did not keep Paul from doing what he needed to do. Note some 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 with all openness.
2. He wrote letters, commonly called his Prison Epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians, as well as personal letters, such as Philemon.
3. Timothy often visited him, as did Tychicus and Mark.
4. Paul witnessed to the Roman guard.

Now as Acts closes, the gospel has reached the center and capital of the world, Rome itself. Notice how the book of Acts ends? "*With all confidence, no man forbidding him*" meaning "*unhindered him.*" Paul worked unhindered. There was still freedom of the gospel going forth. You see, Paul could not go about the city but he could welcome friends in. He never fretted about his condition, but he welcomed all who came and he sent letters back with them -- letters that have changed the world. But the Word was not hindered. No matter what the condition of the church, the Word of God is never bound. We must remember that. God always have a plan.

SUMMARY:

Paul had an appointment which God kept for him. God kept him safe throughout the ordeal of the shipwreck and all the trials that occurred afterwards. When he arrived in Rome he could see God's hand still at work in the fact that he was given courteous and lenient treatment and was allowed to stay by himself in his own house, with the soldiers who guarded him. After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews. When they came together he spoke to them. Now Paul makes it clear that it was the Jews who were against him, not he against them. Despite the abuse and persecution he had experienced from the Jewish people throughout his ministry, he bore his countrymen no animosity.

⁶Paul stated, for this reason "...because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain." The Jewish leaders responded to Paul indicating they had not received letters nor heard of any evil spoken of him. They wanted to hear more from him "*concerning this sect.*" The Jews met Paul and he expounded and testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus. Paul spoke from morning till evening both the Law of Moses and the Prophets. Some believed and some believed not. Then Paul told them that the salvation of God had been sent to the Gentiles, for "*they will hear it!*" The Jews departed and "*had a great dispute among themselves.*" Paul dwelt in his hired home for two years, as he continued under house arrest receiving all who came to him; committed to preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. He taught with all confidence, and no one forbade him.

APPLICATION:

We are challenged to commit our lives to God's care. He upholds His Word!

⁵ <http://www.pbc.org/files/messages/4509/0451.html>

⁶ http://executableoutlines.com/acts/acts_28.htm