

Paul in Rome

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[0 : 00] You know, it's interesting. I heard Michelle say to somebody, so where's Connor this morning? And she said, oh, he's at the end of his rope. What a horrible expression, right? Have you ever thought about that? It never struck me. It's like, well, that's pretty final.

I mean, we could say at the end of a rope versus the rope. I mean, English major, studied English all my life, never. It just struck me there that that's not an amazing expression. Could he climb back up? Maybe.

All right. Welcome here for this Sunday, November 23rd, 2025. My name is Kent Dixon, and it is my joy to be the pastor here.

So our Advent Sermon Series will start next Sunday, November 30th, and that will continue December 7th, the 14th, and the 21st. So I encourage you to be here for that.

It's also a great time, by the way, to bring someone with you to church. And you heard me say, bring with, active, versus invite, passive.

[1 : 03] So let's bring people with us. So this is a new story to lots of people in the world. This is a story that they have not heard. For many of us here this morning, certainly, and in our church and so on, you've heard this story 50 times, 70 times, many, many times.

So the challenge for a pastor, obviously, is to make this story new and fresh, to keep reminding us and encouraging us that this truth of the Messiah coming in Bethlehem is an eternal truth.

So I hope that you will come, and I hope that you will be encouraged. And I thought of something else this morning. So you may remember, I think it was the first year I was here.

By the way, we're coming up on 7. Feels like a long time. Or not, depending on who you ask. So I preached this series called Ugly Christmas Sweater. Anybody remember it, vaguely?

So I've done this lots of times over the years since then, even though it's not the sermon series. If you want to wear an ugly Christmas sweater to church every Sunday during Advent, do it, because I will.

[2 : 18] So don't make me feel like an idiot on my own. Let's be idiots together. Sound good? So do it, because I know lots of you have them, so don't you shy away.

Lots of you have them, and you're just looking for the chance to use it, and now is your time to shine. All right. So this morning, we are, hear this word, concluding our sermon series, Acts to All the Worlds.

And I see lots of people going, yes! And other people going, oh! So as you remember from last Sunday, I said, well, we're going to be starting a new series in Acts next year, right?

I was like, yeah, we'll start it over, because that's what you want. So we're going to be starting a series in Romans next year. But this morning, we're concluding this series.

And over this series, we've dug into the history of the early church together. We've hopefully all learned something from the people and places and events that we have read about and studied together along the way.

[3 : 23] Some nods? Please give me a nod. You've learned some things, I hope. So our passage for this morning is found in Acts 28, verses 17 to 31.

And this is landing the plane. This is the very last passage of Acts that we'll look at. So turn to that in your Bible. Open your Bible app if you do that.

There's a Bible in the pew in front of you. Acts 28, 17 to 31. And I will read this for us as well. 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.

They examined me and wanted to release me because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar.

[4 : 22] I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. For this reason, I've asked to see you and talk with you. It's because of the hope of Israel that I'm bound with this chain.

They replied, We've 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. But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.

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. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. 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, Go to this people and say, You will be ever hearing, but never understanding.

[5 : 32] You will be ever seeing, but never perceiving. 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.

Therefore, I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen. For two whole years, Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him.

He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. So after this very eventful journey that we've looked at over the past few weeks, Paul and his companions finally arrive in Rome.

This is their ultimate destination. Paul received another warm welcome. No, wait. We learn that he was immediately placed under house arrest. No warm welcome this time.

So you may remember that a Roman governor named Festus had inherited, essentially, Paul's case. And that since Paul had appealed directly to Caesar, he did an end run, Paul did, Festus had to send Paul to Rome to have this audience with Caesar.

[6 : 51] So then in Acts 28, verse 30, as we just heard, for two whole years, Paul stayed there in his own rented house. He welcomed everyone who came to see him.

So friends, Paul waited two years to make a personal appeal before Caesar. Maybe you've waited a long time for a doctor's appointment or in line at Safeway.

You have not waited two years, I hope. But we also recognize that Paul was busy during this time. He met with the Jewish leaders in Rome.

He received many visitors and likely composed several of his letters. And we'll get into that. Several of his letters that we now refer to as books of the Bible.

Our sermon this morning is titled Paul in Rome. And we'll come to recognize that this was a very productive time for the Apostle Paul. So let's dig into these final words of Luke's account in Acts together, see what happens there, and what we can learn.

[7 : 54] I hope that sounds okay. So Paul had meetings with Jewish leaders, as we heard in this passage, and had two, actually, that we can recognize. The first meeting, Paul called for all the Jewish leaders in Rome so that he could explain to him why he was there and the reason behind his appeal to Caesar.

He explained that he hadn't done anything wrong against the Jews or their customs, hadn't done anything to harm his own people. Then he went on to explain that Roman officials actually wanted to let him go.

Did you catch that as we read it? Jews from Jerusalem, though, spoke against his release. They got in the way. So his own people, recognize here, got in the way of him being released by the Romans.

And so this ultimately forced him to appeal to the highest earthly authority in the region, Caesar himself. So Paul then said, I don't know if you caught this, but that he, because of the hope of Israel, he says, the gospel itself, that was the reason he had been put in chains and held as a prisoner.

And we learned then that the local Jewish leaders wanted to learn more. This is a healthy thing. They hadn't received any letters from the Jewish people in Judea.

[9 : 17] They hadn't heard anything bad about Paul at all. So they were thinking, what's going on here? They actually wanted to know more from Paul about this sect, as our passage says.

Remember, the way. People who follow Jesus. Christians. They wanted to know more because they knew Paul was the authority. Or an authority.

So then there was another meeting that we hear about. And at a later date, an even larger group of Roman Jews came to where Paul was staying. And as verse 23 tells us, let's hear that again, he witnessed to them, Paul did, from morning till evening.

Now you thought some of my sermons were long. He explained about the kingdom of God and from the law of Moses and from the prophets, he tried to persuade them about Jesus.

Paul was preaching the gospel. So as is often the case, when people heard about Jesus, some of the listeners were, as the passage says, convinced by what he said.

[10 : 22] So does that mean they were convinced that Paul was innocent? Convinced of Paul's circumstances? Or convinced of the truth of Jesus and the power of the gospel?

We don't know. Sorry, Luke doesn't get into specifics there. But then we're also told that others who heard Paul didn't believe what he said.

So again, about him being innocent, making his case, the gospel, both? Again, we don't know for sure. But there was a clear division, we can recognize, among the Jews.

They clearly disagreed over what Paul had said, whether explaining his own circumstances or preaching the gospel. Then we recognize that Paul gives the crowd a stern warning that he actually snatches, which is a good thing, to take things from different places of scripture and echo them, right?

Isaiah 6, verses 9 and 10. That's where this passage comes from. He makes it clear, Paul does, that just as Isaiah had done that, they needed to be cautious of not hearing or seeing God's message to them.

[11 : 33] Pretty important thing he's conveying to these people. Paul also made it clear that the message of salvation had now been given, maybe you heard this part, to Gentiles as well.

So Paul is now saying the message you thought was exclusive, no longer exclusive. God intends it for all people. Paul said that unlike his own people who seem to be, you know, split about it, the Gentiles would listen, Paul says.

Now how does he know? We're all Gentiles, do we always listen? But these closing verses in Acts also indicate that similar interactions happened between Paul and people who came to visit him during those two years that he was in captivity in Rome.

So let's now take some time to consider a few other things about Paul's circumstances in Rome. And many of these details we actually learn about from letters that Paul wrote during his time there. So let's start digging into this a little bit. Paul's circumstances in Rome, well, who are his companions that we know about? Who are his supporting cast in ministry, if you will?

[12 : 46] Well, first there was Timothy. You will hopefully recognize all these names. Timothy was the young disciple who went with Paul on his second missionary journey. He's mentioned in several of Paul's Roman letters that Paul wrote while he was in Romans.

He's mentioned in Philemon, chapter one. He's mentioned in Colossians one, verse one. And Philippians, one, verse one, as well. So Paul mentions Timothy. He was also sent to Philippi by Paul to represent him there.

He was his missionary there. Epaphras is another person we learn about. So Epaphras' first visit to Paul was telling him, he told him, Paul told Paul about the church in Colossae.

And guess what that prompted Paul to write? Colossians. Paul sent greetings from Epaphras to the church at Colossae that are mentioned at the end of the book of Colossians.

And then greetings are also sent from Epaphras again in Philemon, chapter one, verse 23. Paul describes Epaphras as fellow prisoner.

[13 : 56] Onesimus. Onesimus was the runaway slave who converted to Christianity. And he was sent to his master Philemon with a letter from Paul.

What was that letter? Philemon. Onesimus also accompanied Tychicus, say that ten times fast, who delivered Paul's letter to the Colossians.

Another connection to the letters and Paul's partners in ministry. Tychicus was also the one who delivered Paul's letter to the Ephesians. See all these letter, Paul in Rome and letter connections and partners in ministry.

What about Epaphroditus? He brought a gift to Paul from the Philippian church and then he later delivered Paul's letter back to the Philippians.

Lots of interactions here that are interesting. And there's many others that are also mentioned throughout Paul's letters. Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, and a man named Jesus.

[15:02] Not that one, a different one. Known as Justice. He's also named in the Bible. And who can forget Luke? The author of Acts.

The beloved physician who traveled with Paul at many different times. So imprisoned in Rome, Paul's companions and his ministry partners were likely both a great source of comfort to him. They could come and go as they please and visit Paul. Remember, the Romans allowed Paul to have visitors. So these folks were also invaluable in helping him to continue his calling, to continue his mission from behind bars.

What about Paul's preaching? Well, despite his chains, we know that Paul kept preaching. He asked for prayer from other believers for wisdom and boldness to continue in that work that God had called him to.

We know that he converted Onesimus, the runaway slave. He also had opportunities among the palace guards who watched over him. And he even apparently had success in Caesar's own household.

[16:13] Paul's success in preaching to me really reinforces the idea that, friends, the gospel cannot, will not be stopped. That's an amen.

I'll get this very white congregation movie. Paul's success proves the story of God, the redemption that is capable and possible only through the sacrifice of Jesus, can and will not be stopped.

And it is the only thing that can bring peace and hope to this world. Amen. Thank you. What about his letters?

We've touched on that a little bit. Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, you know them all. So these were initially written as letters to specific churches.

But what's amazing to me is that while they were written at specific times and to specific places, the influence and message of those letters that we now recognize as books of the Bible, a group in the 66, they spread from Rome across geography and time and are still inspiring believers to this day and in this very moment this morning.

[17:32] Gabriel, I have to give you five dollars after the service. What about Paul's love for the churches? Paul was a stubborn, unrelenting kind of guy in lots of ways.

But he was fiercely in love with God, fiercely in love with Christ, fiercely in love with his brothers and sisters in churches. And we can see this love and care for the churches of the time powerfully conveyed in these letters that he wrote while he was in Rome.

Now go ahead and read them because you'll get more of Paul there. He wrote to Colossians, which was a church that he had never seen in person.

He wrote Ephesians to a church with whom he had spent a lot of time in person. And he wrote Philippians to a church that was very dear and close to his heart.

He also offered powerful prayers for the churches in Colossae and Ephesus and Philippi that are also recorded in those books. Friends, the fact that Paul expressed so much love and concern for his brothers and sisters in Christ in spite of his own circumstances I think speaks volumes about him having, you've heard this, the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

[18:54] You can see the care of Christ in Paul. Paul speaks about that in Philippians 2 verse 4 to 8 if you're wondering where that same mindset concept comes from.

Something that's really powerful about Paul and his ministry I think, it should be humbling for each of us to recognize that Paul actually rejoiced in his suffering.

He sought to magnify Christ himself through his personal struggles and challenges. Paul recognized that in his weakness Christ's power was perfect.

He recognized also that his imprisonment gave him an opportunity. Gave him the opportunity to practice literally what he had been preaching and seeking to live out all along.

Well my friends, here we are. We started this series, I did all the math and looked back so you can trust me. Started this series on April 7th, 2024.

[19 : 58] Over the course of 19 months, stopping here and there for various other messages and occasions, we've explored the entire book of Acts together in 54 sermons.

Ooh, my back! Oh, don't... Thank you, but don't clap for me. You are on this journey with me. So, I'm a...

You know me, I'm a stats geek. Well, what does that mean? Well, it has added up to approximately 1,422 minutes. Just under 24 hours total.

Roughly one full day of sermon time. Why didn't I do it in one day? Because you would have all left. So, we skipped over a few chapters, as you know, but the book of Acts has 1,007 1,007 verses. And we have touched on the vast majority of them. So, remember, you can always visit any or all of these past explorations and studies that we have done together on the church website.

[21 : 14] A little plug for the website. So, now you know the first 12 chapters of Acts focus on the early church in Jerusalem.

The early work of the apostles. But you've also now seen that the remaining 16 chapters detail the complete missionary journeys of the apostle Paul.

So, from the time of the ascension of Jesus to Paul's imprisonment in Rome, we've covered it all. No wonder my beard is more gray now than when we started.

So, this morning we focused on the two years Paul was in Rome. Commentator J.M. McGarvey notes, no two years of Paul's life were better filled with earnest labor than these two spent in his Roman prison.

I believe that we've definitely seen that for ourselves. Paul wrote in Philippians himself, Philippians 1, 12-14. Now, I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.

[22 : 29] As a result, it has been clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

What an example Paul has been. My prayer for each of us, friends, is that we can recognize that even in hard times, and I know so many of you are facing hard times, God is with us.

God is with you. So we can learn from Paul's example and indeed the examples of all of the individuals and events of the early church that we have explored together, that God will work all things out of hard times and difficult situations and use whatever circumstances in which we find ourselves for our ultimate good and his glory.

Glory be to God in and through his church, my friends, forever and ever. Amen. Amen.