

# All Roads Lead to Rome

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Preacher: Phil Meulman

[ 0 : 00 ] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 19th of September 1999. The preacher is Phil Muleman.

His sermon is entitled All Roads Lead to Rome and is from Acts 28 1-31. We thank you gracious God for this word that you have written to us in the book of Acts.

Lord, help us to understand it tonight and help us to live it out in our lives to be your servants for the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

We all like to hear stories about human beings. They generate huge interest and more importantly, we like to hear stories of how people overcome difficult or tricky situations or overcome the odds. I'll give you a few examples. When Stuart Diver was rescued from the collapsed ski lodge in Threadbo two years ago, a nation watched in wonder. We had live pictures of him being pulled out of that scenario.

[ 1 : 12 ] When Tony Bullimore was plucked from the Southern Ocean by the Navy, the Australian Navy, we watched in wonder as this guy bobbed his head up from the water from under that boat.

And in recent weeks, there was the pictures of a young Turkish child pulled from the rubble of the collapsed building after five or six days following the earthquake in Turkey and the world was stunned.

Acts 27, chapter 27 and 28 are events recorded by Paul's companion Luke which graphically tell us of an amazing rescue and the amazing courage of one man.

But it isn't a story of, necessarily of survival nor of heroics that Luke is trying to portray. Those elements are all there within that story. But it is rather a story about the Apostle Paul's unshakable faith in God and confidence that God will fulfill his purposes despite the surrounding circumstances that he is placed within.

And with that kind of confidence and knowledge in mind, we see how the Apostle Paul continues on serving God no matter the circumstances, no matter what the circumstances that surround him are.

[ 2 : 39 ] Now, if you were here last week, you will recall that Paul survived the forces of nature from Acts 27. He sailed through a horrendous storm.

And here tonight, chapter 28 tells us of what happens next on Paul's incredible adventure or trip, if you like, to Rome. Let me just sketch some of the details.

We've heard it read. We've seen it. The boat at the end of chapter 27 of Acts is shipwrecked and all 276 people on board that ship end up on the island of Malta as the beginning of chapter 28 tells us. And that was told to Paul in a vision that he had from an angel of God, wasn't it? And it happened just as he'd been told. The other thing we see is that the natives of Malta offer unusual hospitality and kindness to the people.

They offer them hospitality. They surround them with a warm fire and so on. And in that process we see that the apostle Paul is bitten by a viper which leads the natives of Malta to think that Paul is a murderer.

[ 3 : 50 ] The sea didn't kill him. Well, now he's going to die. The viper's bit him. He's gone. They were a superstitious bunch. But when Paul offers, when Paul suffers no ill effects, they conclude that this guy's not a murderer but he must be a god.

Well, what a fickle lot of people we can be. We can change our mind as quick as anything. Then after miraculously healing Publius' father and other people, we see that Paul does some amazing things.

He cures people. Now, we shouldn't be surprised at this supernatural cure that goes on here and the other people that he heals. Because those sorts of things, the miraculous signs and wonders that accompanied Paul were part of the apostles' ministry.

2 Corinthians 12, verse 12 tells us that Paul, right into the Corinthians, he says, The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience.

Signs and wonders and mighty works. They were the marks of an apostle. Paul here is displaying his wonders and mighty works. Now, although we don't hear much more about Paul's work on the island of Malta, it's obvious again that God is with Paul and is continuing to fulfil the promises that was promised to Paul in chapter 27 and verse 24, which implies that Paul will eventually get to Rome.

[ 5 : 26 ] The boat was going to be wrecked, but he will get to Rome and have an audience with the emperor. Well, Paul has spent some time on the island of Malta and verses 11 through to 16 of chapter 28 tell us how Paul did eventually make it to Rome.

And his trip to Rome from the point of Malta on is much smoother sailing than chapter 27. I don't think he got seasick on the way.

And along the way there are some great encouragements and there are some great blessings for Paul as he heads off to Rome. Now, whenever I get to a new place, there is a sense of nervousness by me about what to expect.

You never know. I wonder what the people are going to be like. I wonder what the situation is going to be like and so on. Well, I wonder if Paul had the same sort of fear and nervousness that I had when he landed perhaps at the port of Puteoli.

Now, Puteoli, we're told here, is where he landed and it's a port of Rome. And Paul is now on the very threshold of the capital of the Western world as we knew it, of the world as we knew it.

[ 6 : 39 ] And there must have been a sense of nervousness and even loneliness as he thought about what may lie ahead of him. But God sends along blessings for the Apostle Paul.

Verse 14 tells us that he stays with some believers here in Puteoli. That is, he stays with other Christians before making plans to get to the city of Rome itself. Now, it's important to remember here that Paul is a prisoner and he is not free to do what he wants to.

But here he is, he is able to stay with some Christians in this port of Puteoli. And while he waits out to find out his plans, he takes rest and courage with these Christians in this port while the Roman centurion, Julius, goes off to find out what plans are going to do to travel to Rome with the other prisoners.

And finally, when they do head off on their final journey to Rome, they head off by land, they go along a road, I believe it's called the Appian Road or the Appian Highway to Rome.

And while they're heading along this road, God sends another blessing to Paul. Christians in Rome had heard that the Apostle Paul was coming.

[ 7 : 53 ] So a number of them had set out to meet him and his party along the way. And what an emotional, what an emotional experience for Paul to meet personally Christians from the city that he had dreamt of visiting.

Now Paul had written his letter to the Romans some years before. And here, several years later, he is meeting face to face some of those to whom he had written.

And it would surely have lifted his spirits. For verse 16 tells us, on seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage.

Now I recall meeting some years ago some Christians in Syria. And I was travelling on, you've all heard my stories of travelling from London to Kathmandu, I was travelling on this truck with a group of people and there weren't any Christians at that time.

And I met these Christians in Syria. And it was a great source of encouragement to me as we talked and we fellowshiped together. And I remember being amazed at the things that we had in common even though we'd never met before and we were from totally different cultures.

[ 9 : 12 ] But what united us was the hope and the courage that we had in the gospel and in God's kingdom. And I remember saying words on our departure, words to the effect of we'll see you again.

They might sound like trite words when you say we'll see you later sort of thing, we might see you again. But for Christians that's not something that we should take lightly in some respects because we may not see these people again in this physical world but there is a whole eternity for us in heaven to look forward to where we will meet again.

And that's something to look forward to. I can't remember what they look like but I might remember then. Well Paul's arrival in Rome reminds us again that he is still a prisoner but he's permitted to live in his own lodgings while remaining under the surveillance of a Roman soldier or centurion to whom

he's probably chained at the right wrist.

And verses 17 through to 22 explains to us why Paul is in Rome and it climaxes in the statement from the second part of verse 20 and that is it is for the sake of the hope of Israel that I am bound with chains.

That is why he's in Rome. He's here to defend the faith and so on. In verses 23 to 28 we see a familiar pattern for Paul's preaching of the gospel.

[10:39] It's a pattern that we have seen throughout the whole book of Acts as we've preached through it. And that is that Paul's gospel message the message that he has to preach of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God starts first with the Jews in the city.

He goes first to the Jews. The Jews had shown an interest in Christianity and so a meeting was arranged for them to come to his place. And when they came what did he do?

He testified about the kingdom of God trying to convince or to persuade them about Jesus from both the law of Moses and the prophets. In other words he proclaimed the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ to them from the scriptures.

Now some were convinced while others refused to believe. Those who rejected the message had stubborn hearts and didn't want to believe. The result of the meeting was unpleasant for Paul. It wasn't a happy outcome. But he's used to that. It's nothing new. He's seen this happen throughout his ministry of gospel proclamation. As in other places where the gospel is proclaimed to the Jews and then rejected Paul now sees that the door is open for the gospel to be freely proclaimed within the Gentile community as well.

[12:04] That is for people who are other than Jews. Paul highlights the tragedy of the Jewish rejection of the gospel message by quoting words from Isaiah to explain the Jewish resistance to the gospel and the essence of their resistance is due to their hardened hearts.

They do not want to hear the message that Paul wants to proclaim. It's rather sad really. But then Acts sort of finishes and Acts doesn't finish on a sad note.

Rather it ends on a glorious note. Luke, the writer of this book tells us in the last two verses that for two years Paul has a bold witness to all who came to him.

Now remember Paul is in Rome. He's in chains. He's unable to go out and so the people come to him and Paul despite the circumstances around him he has a bold witness about the kingdom of God as we're told here and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I have no doubt that there would have been probably Jews and Gentiles included in that proclamation and teaching that Paul gave for these two whole years while he's in Rome.

[13:28] Well what is it that gave Paul, the Apostle Paul the confidence to do what he did? How under such adversity is he able to continue on proclaiming the Gospel in the manner that he did for two whole years in the city of Rome?

The answer is that he had an unshakable faith in God. An unshakable faith in God. And that meant that he sat under God's sovereignty.

He submitted to God fully. He didn't just submit in part but the whole of himself. He submitted to God. He wasn't half-hearted about this submission.

It was total submission to him in service and so on. He knew where he stood before God and he had a healthy fear of God as well. Everything that Paul did, everything, not just some things, everything he did was in order to serve his God.

I want to suggest to us that people who sit under God's sovereignty ought to have confidence to do whatever God calls us to do.

[14:44] In the context of this passage in Acts and the context of the whole of the book of Acts, I want to suggest that people who sit under God's sovereignty ought to have confidence to be involved in evangelism.

That is, in the proclamation of the Christian gospel. You see, and you see that throughout the whole of Acts, don't you? The sovereignty of God is affirmed by Christians in various situations.

From the very first persecution of the believers in Acts 4, which resulted in a prayer which reflected on God's sovereignty, in the scattering of believers that became the scattering of the seeds of the gospel as refugees were transformed into missionaries in chapter 8, right through here to the unusual way in which Paul was brought to Rome in the final chapters of Acts.

Throughout the whole book of Acts we see how the Christian proclamation of the gospel, that is, evangelism, thrives under the shadow of the sovereignty of God.

Despite the difficult situations that the Christians find themselves in, evangelism thrives. People are converted. People come under submission to God.

[16:02] So where evangelism is happening, that is, where people are being brought into God's kingdom by repentance, faith and obedience to Jesus as Lord, you can be sure that those evangelising are sitting under God's sovereign will.

Now the apostle Paul was in some diabolical situations last week in a storm which threatened to take their lives. Here we see him in Rome.

He's in chains for the sake of the gospel. But he still went on and served his God because he submitted to him. God also gave Paul confidence to serve him as well.

In our world of technology I think it is hard for Christians to sit under God's sovereignty. We try to predict outcomes.

We rely more on statistics rather than God's leading to minister in various situations. And we use the statistics as masters and not really the tools that they should be to give us aid and so on.

[17:14] And when tough times come upon us we pull out of a certain context before we see what God might have us do in that situation. Sometimes God wants us to struggle with situations so that we might grow in our faith.

So that we might be able to see God's sovereign nature. So that we might be able to tell others about God's kingdom and his rule over our lives. God wants us to do in that way.

Now I hate going to the dentist because of the pain that may be inflicted upon me. Who hates going to the dentist? I hate needles.

But I do know of the benefit of going so that I may have teeth to eat with in the days ahead and I like food. It's like that with Christianity in some respects.

The goal of all Christians surely is the heavenly reward that awaits his people in eternity. But there will be trial and suffering for all along the way.

[18:26] We all need to go to the dentist. There will be trial and suffering for all along the way.

Jesus never said that following him would be smooth sailing and surely Jesus' own life, has shown us that.

And surely as we've looked through the book of Acts, we've seen that life as Christians is not always plain or smooth sailing. Again, the problem for many Christians in today's world is that there is no sense of the heavenly reward that awaits us when we physically die.

And that's reflected in the way that we tell others about the kingdom of God. Or should I say that we don't tell others about the kingdom of God. I think that we are all capable of telling others what Jesus has done for us personally.

And in today's evangelism, we tend to focus on how Jesus meets our personal needs. Now that's of course appropriate. I don't think that that's necessarily wrong.

God is going to find out that God does not meet some need which they consider urgent. For example, such as finding the right person to live their married life with or getting the right job, making sure that you have the necessary finances in situations and so on.

[19:54] we might consider those sorts of things urgent and at such times when these things don't seem to be answered in the way which we expect them to be answered, we're not seeing Jesus meet our personal needs, at such times we may be tempted to stray from Jesus and find help elsewhere.

Now if we were to proclaim and to teach the grand picture of the kingdom of God in our gospel proclamation, that is, that we preach about the benefits of eternal life where there need not be any fear of suffering, need not be any fear of demons, no fear of enemies, need not be any fear of economic reversals and failures and so on, if we preach that whole thing about the kingdom of God then this is going to be liberating news for many people.

If the grand picture of the kingdom of God is firmly rooted in our minds and into the minds of those whom we speak to, then I think that they will never forsake the sovereign God of the universe for smaller, less powerful forces such as lust, greed and selfishness and so on.

And friends, that's what Paul did. Paul preached and proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about Jesus Christ as Lord.

Now I'm not saying that we should ever, for a minute, give up teaching about Jesus and what he has done for you. Because when we proclaim Jesus in doing so, we describe who he is, what he has done for you and what he is doing and continuing to do in the world.

[ 21 : 48 ] And that shows us, and to those who we proclaim the gospel to, that we have a living God whom we worship today and will continue to worship into eternity.

But as Paul did, we need to preach the kingdom of God and Jesus Christ's Lordship. When I was born, our western world had a framework or a world view which was still largely Christian, still had the sort of the Christian thought to it.

Now with the emergence of what we call post-modernism, Christianity has been rejected in the western world and thus people's world views, that is the way that they look at life, is not necessarily Christian.

In fact, it's quite unchristian. And people's world views are whatever they want it to be. You think like that, that's okay, that's fine, you think like that, I'll think like this and so on.

So when we are involved as Christians in the process of evangelism, it's not straightforward anymore just to talk about Jesus. Rather, a key to effective evangelism is teaching people what Christians believe and being sensitive to those people's reactions.

[ 23 : 09 ] Christians. So when we are involved in evangelism, sure, we tell them about Jesus and what he has done for us and so on, but we also talk about God. Because for many now, the starting point for where we proclaim the Christian gospel is not at Jesus, it's going right back to God, going right back to the very first book of the Bible, starting there.

So we talk about God when we are involved in evangelism. We talk about sin. That's a very hard concept to get across to people in this day and age where we think that, where people believe that there is nothing bad and so on.

We talk about sin. We talk about the Bible. We talk about how it is our authority in matters, how it is our map, how it guides and directs us. And of course we talk about salvation, about what Jesus has done for us, for you and for me.

And we need to talk about heaven, the goal for all Christians. It's the goal that we as Christians strive towards. Now if you don't think that telling others about God is important or if you don't think that you have a responsibility in telling others about God, then I want to challenge you to re-examine your faith.

I want to challenge you to see what the Bible has to say about the proclamation and the teaching of the gospel. You see, as this book of Acts closes, it reminds us that evangelism is the passion that ignites our activity.

[ 24 : 48 ] We desire to tell others about God. God has acted decisively in Jesus Christ to save the human race. In him and through him alone lies the solution to the problems of the human race.

And friends, there's lots of problems out there. If we love this world as God does, we will want to tell the world the liberating good news about the kingdom of God that is preached to us or brought to us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And this business ought to and will consume our passion to the very day that we die. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Heavenly Father, we pray that you would give us a passion for telling others about you, about what you have done to bring this world back into a relationship with you through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you for this book of Acts and as we preached through it, looked at it over the last months, that we would see that it's not smooth sailing, that we would see though that we can have great confidence in you.

Please give us the necessary words to proclaim and to teach about what you have done for us. And Lord, we thank you for your word that gives us instruction and may we be confident in it and may we be confident in the friendships and the relationships we have with our Christians, brothers and sisters here at Holy Trinity.

[ 26 : 25 ] Give us courage in the days ahead to be passionate about proclaiming your word in all that we do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.