

March 12, 2023 by Steve Brandon



Rome at Last!

Acts 28:11-29

1. Traveling to Rome (verses 11-16)
2. Informing the Jews (verses 17-22)
3. Teaching the Jews (verses 23-29)

I remember when my wife and I were on a missions trip in India. We went deep into the interior of India, to a place called Arunachel Pradesh, north of India. We went to a very remote place. At one point along our travels, we were told by the locals that we were the first Western people to ever stop at a certain village. Any of the westerners that would come that way, would merely pass by their village. But we stopped, because there was a believing family in the village that we visited for the day.

I have a picture of our encounter in that place. You can see that all of the locals were looking at us! We were the strange ones in that place. Many in the village had come out to see who was there. They were taking pictures and videos of us. I'm sure to bring back home to show their families. People were giving their phones to our pastor friend, Stephen Fish, who would use them to take pictures of us. Like the selfie that I took on the bottom right. It was really an incredible trip.

As we traveled deeper into the country, we came along houses that looked like bamboo huts. We spent a few days living in such a house, training pastors and teaching the people of the church. The villages we visited in this region were full of sun-worshippers. To designate that, the families flew their flags. But when people became Christians, they took down their flags. What a joy it was to fellowship with those in the church, who had turned from their sun worship, to worship Jesus Christ.

Now, my purpose this morning isn't to tell you all about my trip to the other side of the world. My purpose is to tell you of my travels home. We were so deep in India, that when it was time to travel home, it took us four days to get home. The first day was spent driving the windy roads down the mountain and across the river on the barge, to arrive at a city with an airport. From there, we caught the daily flight to New Delhi, late in the day. On our third day, we took a flight to London. We had an overnight layover, and took a flight to Chicago on the next day, until we reached home at last.

Four days it took us to get home. But four days is nothing compared to the trip that Paul took on his way to Rome. It took him several years. The title of my message this morning is "Rome at Last!" Because, in our text, we will see Paul finally arriving in Rome. My text is Acts, chapter 28, verses 11-29.

Since Paul's days in Ephesus, Paul had his mind upon getting to Rome. We read in Acts 19:21, "Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, after I have been there, I must also see Rome." From that moment on, it took several years until he arrived at Rome. Let's take a few moments and track the journey.

Remember, Paul was on his third missionary journey. He was in Ephesus when he "resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, 'After I have been there, I must also see Rome.'" If you look on a map in the back of your Bible, you can find Ephesus, which is near the western border of Asia Minor (which is modern-day Turkey). When it came time, Paul "said farewell [to those in Ephesus] and departed for Macedonia" (Acts 20:1).

After spending some time in Macedonia, encouraging the saints, Paul then traveled into Achaia (Acts 20:2). Paul was in Achaia for three months (Acts 20:3). He then returned back to Macedonia, from where he came. He crossed back across the Aegean Sea and arrived at Troas, where he stayed for seven days (Acts 20:6). This is where, if you remember, Eutychus fell out of the window during Paul's long sermon. From Troas, he traveled south to Miletus, where he met with the Ephesian elders before continuing on in his journey (Acts 20:17-35). From there, he set sail, hoping to arrive at Jerusalem in time for Pentecost.

He "came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara" (Acts 21:1). Paul and his companions found a ship heading to Phoenicia, which they boarded. Eventually landing in Tyre, and then to Caesarea, and then to Jerusalem. With his return to Jerusalem, Paul's third missionary journey was complete. This was the third leg of his trip to Rome. He had made it to Macedonia and Achaia. He had made it to Jerusalem. All that was left for Paul was to make it to Rome (Acts 19:21).

Now, his trip to Rome wasn't quite like he had planned. I am sure that he had planned to travel there by his own free will. But, Paul was sent there as a prisoner, to stand trial before Caesar. After spending two years in a jail in Caesarea. For the last three weeks at Rock Valley Bible Church, we have been tracking his trip to Rome. It began from Caesarea, where Paul boarded a ship as a Roman prisoner, under the watch of a centurion named Julius (Acts 27:1). Along with Paul was Luke (the author of the book of Acts), and Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica (Acts 27:2).

The embarked on their journey by heading north along the coast to Sidon. From there, they travelled to Myra. In Myra, they changed ships and sailed off to Cnidus. Then down to the island of Crete, where they landed at a port in Fair Havens. This entire trip wasn't easy, as the winds were constantly against them. From Fair Havens, they set sail, hoping to spend the winter in Phoenix a better port on the Island of Crete. But they were blown off course, and into the open sea, where the storm tossed them all about. Things were bad enough that they

threw their cargo overboard to make the ship lighter (Acts 27:13).

After two weeks of enduring the storm, "all hope of [their] being saved was abandoned" (Acts 27:20). But in God's providence, their course set them toward a small island called Malta. It was here upon that island that they ran ashore, smashing the boat to pieces, but saving all 276 people on the boat.

Last week, we looked at the first 10 verses of Acts 28, which records what took place on the island of Malta. Miracles happened on Malta. Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake, but didn't die (Acts 28:6). And Paul healed the father of Publius from his fever and dysentery (Acts 28:7). And all on the island who had diseases came to Luke and Paul and were cured. They were three months on Malta. and then, they headed north to Rome. And it is right here that our text begins.

Acts 28:11-16

After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.

It is from these verses that we get our first point this morning:

1. Traveling to Rome (verses 11-16)

In verse 11, we read of the boat that they used to leave Malta. It had to be a different boat from the one they arrived in, as that one was smashed on the rocks. This boat was "a ship of Alexandria" (as stated in verse 11). We see a curious fact about the boat: It had "the twin gods as a figurehead." These "twin gods" were the gods Castor and Pollux, the "patron deities who would protect them from the dangers of the sea."^[1] They were "considered by sailors [to be] a sign of good fortune in a storm."^[2] This is not so unlike the practice of many Roman Catholics today who hang pendants of Saint Christopher from the rear view mirrors of their cars. He is believed to be the saint who interceded for those who travel, protecting them from danger. Of course, Paul and his traveling companions weren't trusting these idols. They were trusting in the Lord, who brought everyone safely to Malta. who would bring Paul safely to Rome.

In verse 12, we see this ship 12 putting in at Syracuse. After three days, they 13 arrived at Rhegium. The next day, they 13 came to Puteoli. In Puteoli, verse 14 tells us that "There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days." There were Christians in Puteoli! The gospel had spread! We don't know who brought the gospel to Puteoli. But we know how it came. It came the same way that it always comes, through people being witnesses, through people telling others of Jesus.

Somehow, someone went to Puteoli, and shared the gospel with someone from Puteoli. And the Lord opened hearts and minds to embrace Jesus, the crucified Messiah, who died on the cross for our sins! And those who lived in Puteoli believed! They believed in Jesus and experienced the forgiveness of their sins! We don't know who brought the gospel to them. Only God knows.

I find this encouraging, because, in your ministry to other people, you may be the unnamed one who shares the gospel and thus, spreads God's kingdom a little further than ever before. Your name won't be written in a book. You won't gain any notoriety. But God will know of your faithful witness to others.

But Puteoli wasn't the only city where there were believers. There were also believers in the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns, two cities on way to Rome. Verse 15 tells of how believers in these cities traveled to Puteoli to greet Paul!

Acts 28:15

And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage.

Presumably, they joined Paul in his walk to Rome, of forty miles or so.

The question that comes to mind here is this: "How are all of these people so aware of Paul?" It's one thing for believers to be present in a city. It's another thing for believers those cities, that had never seen Paul before, to be so excited that Paul had come to them, that they walked all day to meet Paul and greet him, and usher him into Rome! The answer to this question lies right in your open Bible. If you look across the page from Acts 28, you will find Paul's letter to the Romans.^[3] Apparently, they had read the letter and knew all about Paul!

In the book of Romans, Paul expressed his eagerness to get to Rome! "I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome" (Romans 1:15). I believe that this verse is a good summary of the book of Romans. If you were here in those days when I preached through the book of Rome, you will no doubt, remember my title slide, "Eager to Preach the Gospel." The reason for Paul's eagerness was clear. Paul give the reason. He says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith'" (Romans 1:16-17).

Indeed, the gospel is powerful! It's powerful to forgives us all of our sins! It's powerful to conquer all our sins! It's powerful to bring us to heaven! This is what Romans is all about! Romans begins (in chapter 1-3) by talking about sin, and how we all are under the bondage and condemnation of sin. Romans continues to address salvation (Romans 3-5), how through faith in Jesus, we can be saved from our sins. Then Paul continues in Romans with a discussion about Sanctification (Romans 6-7), how the gospel works to turn our hearts from sin. In chapter 8 of Romans, we read about our security in Christ, that nothing can separate us from his life. Romans 9-11 are devoted to talking about the sovereignty of God in our salvation. Romans 12-16 bring the application to the gospel: service. God saves us to serve others!

This letter was received by those in Rome, and shared with the surrounding cities: the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns. Apparently, this letter had been such a blessing to them, that they were thrilled to greet the human author of the letter. They had expected Paul to come. At the end of Romans, Paul wrote, "I have longed for many years to come to you. I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while" (Romans 15:23-24).

Though Paul had never seen them face to face, he told them that he wanted to come and see them, and after seeing them, to continue on west to keep spreading the gospel. Though now he was coming as a prisoner, and not as a free man, those in Rome who would see him would rejoice in meeting the author of the great letter that they had received! Their coming from these cities, was merely a demonstration of their admiration for Paul.

In verse 16, we see Paul in "Rome at Last."

Acts 28:16

And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.

So, Paul wasn't free to travel about Rome, like he had hoped. but at least he was there! he had made it! The rest of the chapter in Acts will tell us about what Paul did in Rome. So, we have seen Paul, "Traveling to Rome" in verses 11-16. Now, we see Paul ...

2. Informing the Jews (verses 17-22)

Acts 28:17-22

After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, "Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar—though I had no charge to bring against my nation. For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain." And they said to him, "We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against."

We see Paul here informing the Jews of why he is in Rome! He begins by saying, "I had done nothing wrong! Yet, I was delivered into the hands of the Romans as a prisoner" (verse 17). Paul, here is referring back to when he was seized in the temple area, and falsely accused of being (1) a disturber of the peace; (2) a leader of a false religion; and (3) a profaner of the temple. None of these were true. This was verified by the Romans who examined him, as Paul explains in verse 18.

The Romans were willing to release him, But the Jews wanted him killed! Paul's only recourse was to appeal to Caesar! That's when Festus said those famous words, "To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go" (Acts 25:12). And finally, Paul is in Rome, ready to appear before Caesar. But first, Paul invites the Jews to come and talk with him, to explain everything. This is sort of a pre-trial hearing, if you will.

Paul has hopes of persuading these Jews to his side: "For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain" (verse 20). Again, don't miss the fact, that Paul is there as a prisoner, bound by shackles. In that state, Paul was requesting that the local Jewish leaders in Rome come and talk with him.

Apparently, these Jewish leaders knew very little about Paul's situation. They said to him, "We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against" (verses 21-22). They haven't received any fore-warning that Paul was coming.

Apparently, Festus never really figured out what to send to Caesar, to try Paul in Rome (Acts 25:26-27). He just sent him away to Rome. Those in Rome didn't know that he was coming. Nor had they heard anyone speak badly of Paul. But they do know that "sect" of Judaism (as they call it), doesn't have a good reputation. It is "everywhere spoken against." But the sense here is that these Jews don't know why it is spoken against. So, they said, "we desire to hear from you what your views are" (verse 22).

In verse 23, we see the date being set and the Jews assembled to hear Paul out. This is my third point.

3. Teaching the Jews (verses 23-29)

Acts 28:23

When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers.

That is, more than merely the local leaders. There were people who came from the synagogues. Verse 23 continues with these words:

Acts 28:23

From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.

Wouldn't it be nice to have a recording of that meeting! Morning until evening, Paul taking the Old Testament, and explaining the kingdom of God to these Jews, and "trying to convince them about Jesus."

It reminds me of what Jesus did on the Road to Emmaus, recorded in Luke, chapter 24. When the dejected disciples didn't understand about

the need for Jesus to die and rise from the dead, Jesus said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27).

Paul was doing the same thing. He was explaining Jesus "from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets" (Acts 28:23).

Paul would have begun with passages like Genesis 3:15, which tells of God's plan for the redeemer. Though Satan would strike him on the heel, the seed of the woman would deliver a death blow to Satan. Paul would have continued to passages like Genesis 12, which tells of the call of Abraham, when God promised to bless him, saying, "In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed!" This is the gospel, that world-wide blessing would come! It would come through the Messiah! And the Messiah would be a Jew, of the line of Abraham! And whoever believes in the Messiah would be blessed of the Lord! Paul would have gone to Psalms, like Psalm 22, which describes the crucifixion of Jesus, or like Psalm 16, which describes the resurrection, or like Psalm 2, which describes the coronation of the king that the LORD will set on Zion.

Paul would have gone to the Prophets, like Micah (5:2), who prophesied of the coming of Messiah from Jerusalem, like Zechariah (9:9), who prophesied of the Messiah coming into Jerusalem on a donkey, or like Daniel (chapter 9), who prophesied of the exact time of the coming of the Messiah. Paul would have gone to Isaiah 35, which describes the ministry of Jesus, opening the eyes of the blind, unstopping the ears of the deaf, seeing the lame men leap like the deer (Isaiah 35:5-6). Paul would have gone to Isaiah 53, which describes the suffering of the Messiah. Paul may have talked about Isaiah 40 and Malachi 4, which prophesy of the forerunner coming before Jesus, how this was fulfilled in John the Baptist.

This is what Paul would have done, all day long. Going from passage to passage to passage, reading them, explaining them, and pressing upon the Jews to believe them! What a Bible seminar that would have been! The results of the seminar were mixed.

Acts 28:24

And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved.

This has always been the pattern in the book of Acts. Whenever the gospel is preached, some believe. and others don't. In our day, here in America, in my experience, at least, most don't believe. But would the Holy Spirit come upon us like he did in the early church as recorded in the book of Acts, many would believe. and many would not. In verse 25, we see the mixed results.

Acts 28:25-29

And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet:

"Go to this people, and say, 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.' For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'

Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen." [Some manuscripts add] And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, having much dispute among themselves.

This is one last passage the Paul referred to. It's from Isaiah, chapter 6. That's the famous chapter of the Old Testament, in which Isaiah sees the throne room of God. with the seraphim flying around the throne saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of his glory!" (Isaiah 6:3). Isaiah is broken at the sight because of his sin. He says, "Woe is me! For I am lost; For I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of an people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." He's cleansed and forgiven by the burning coal touching his lips.

Then the Lord says, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah says, "Here I am! Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8). God sends him on a mission of hardening. Preach to the people who will hear, but not understand (Isaiah 6:9). who will see, but not perceive (Isaiah 6:9). This is what Paul did for an entire day. He preached the good news to the people. But their hearts were dull! And their eyes were dim! And they refused to believe!

And as Paul often did, after the Jews rejected the message, he turned to the Gentiles. Because the gospel was "for the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:17). In verse 28, we see Paul's intent to turn to the Gentiles with the gospel!

Acts 28:28

Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.

And that's what we will see in verses 30 and 31, which we will pick up next week. Paul preaching to the Gentiles for two years, proclaiming the kingdom of God.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 12, 2023 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] Simon Kistemaker, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990), 953-54.

[2] Richard N. Longenecker, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 9* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 566.

[3] This letter was written to those in Rome around the time when Paul was “resolved in his spirit” to go to Rome Acts 19:21.