

Acts 28 Paul under house arrest

Bible readings:

Acts 28: 1- 10 Paul in Malta

Acts 28: 15 – 24, 28 – 31 Paul arrives in Rome, and placed under house arrest

Thoughts:

After the dramatic events of the shipwreck, which Debbie so helpfully described last week, Paul's stay on Malta continues to be dramatic:

- The welcome of the people v2
- The incident with the snake v3-6
- The healing of Publius's father and the hospitality extended to Paul and his companions v7 - 10

Thoughts:

For Paul and his companions the welcome they received from the people of Malta is illustrative of the way so many respond to moments of crisis – kindness and generosity, and a willingness to help. The welcome they received was unexpected but heart-warming, and must have given them hope.

We have seen this here in the UK over the past few days, especially with people volunteering to assist the NHS to care for those who are most vulnerable in the coronavirus crisis.

Indeed after the incident with the snake (v3-6) the people thought Paul was a god, and (v10) they are showered with honours, and provisions for the onward journey.

It appears that even though they were in a place of genuine hardship, Paul and his companions knew that the Lord was with them, and this is underlined by the healing of Publius' father and the generosity of the island people. Here is another official who finds that Paul was a person who could be trusted and valued.

As Tom Wright comments: 'The sea and the snake have done their worst and are overcome. New creation is happening, and the powers of evil cannot stop it.'

Application:

In our familiarity with the events described in Acts, I think we can miss, or overlook, the fact that for Paul and his companions these are actual events, in real time, happening as the adventure unfolded, unforeseen and unheralded. They had no idea how the islanders would react, or when bitten by the deadly snake, that the Lord would instantly heal Paul, or how Publius would respond to the healing of his father. They simply had to trust the Lord and do what they sensed the Holy Spirit was asking them to do. So, for ourselves, as we face the worldwide pandemic of Covid-19, and its effects upon our nation and our everyday lives, we don't know the eventual outcome, or how the Lord will act in response to our prayers – we have to journey on in faith and trust. Perhaps in the future, we may be able to look back and see clearly what God was doing, and how amazing answers to prayer unfolded along the way, and how people's lives were changed.

However, like Paul, we too can know that the Lord is with us, even in times of hardship. We have His promise that He will never leave us; we, too, know that the Holy Spirit indwells us, and that our heavenly Father knows our every need, and promises to provide (Matthew 6: 32).

Just as hard circumstances didn't shake Paul's faith, so we, too, can be given strength to keep going in our faith, even through difficult circumstances. We, too, can know that the powers of evil are overcome in

Jesus name, and that the Lord can work even the most difficult of circumstances for our good, and that of the life-giving gospel we have to share.

And just as Publius found that Paul was trustworthy and an honest person, so we, too, are to be living examples of the life and love of the Lord Jesus in our day, and are found to be trustworthy and honest, people of integrity and truth.

Paul arrives in Rome:

And so the adventure continues for Paul, Luke and the others. After a three stage journey by boat they eventually arrive in Puteoli [a suburb of Naples] where some believers invited them to stay for a week, before they arrived in Rome itself. The Three Taverns was about 35 miles from Rome [I didn't know that a certain brewery operated so long ago! see v15]

- Paul is welcomed v15
- Paul meets the local Jewish leaders v17 – 23
- A mixed response: v24 – 28
- The final scene: Paul continues his teaching in his own rented house – v30 – 31

Once in Rome, Paul is allowed his own private lodging, albeit guarded by a soldier (v16). His Jewish roots provide Paul with the means to contact the local Jewish leaders, and within three days has invited those leaders to meet him, so he can explain what is happening, and why he is in Rome.

The response of the leaders is interesting: clearly they have not heard anything bad about Paul himself (v21), but Christians in general have, as they 'are denounced everywhere'.

And so Paul sets a date and from his house he teaches them all day about Jesus from the Jewish Scriptures. He has a mixed response (v24), some believe and others don't.

And Acts finishes with Paul living in his own rented house, welcoming guests, and continuing his gospel teaching ministry – with no one trying to stop him.

Application thoughts:

The presence of other Christians was a source of thanksgiving and courage to Paul. As Christians we do need one another. We can be a source of strength and gratitude to God for others in times of stress. Even in this 'lock down' situation because of the coronavirus, a phone call or message from another Christian can be wonderfully encouraging. We need one another at a time like this, and I am so grateful to everyone in All Saints' and St. Luke's who is helping to keep us in contact with one another.

These closing verses of chapter 28 are also a remarkable picture of how Paul was not going to be deterred in sharing the gospel, and how he uses his circumstances to go on proclaiming the gospel 'with all boldness'. I find this challenging, and these verses underline how Paul uses every opportunity to share something of the gospel message. We, in our turn, are asked to make the most of every opportunity (Colossians 4:5), and Paul led by example.

However, like Paul, we, too, are likely to have a mixed response to our sharing the gospel. We will have the joy of seeing people come into a living faith in the Lord Jesus, and what a joy that is! However, we will also see others for whom the proverbial penny doesn't drop, and indeed might find offense in the gospel, and turn away, sad though that is. Just as people misunderstood Paul, so we might find people misunderstanding us, and reading into our witness things that are not there, and are artificial constructs of hearsay and prejudice.

And another thought: just as Paul used his background to make connections with the Jewish leaders in Rome, so each of us has particular experiences, knowledge and connections that are unique to us, and following Paul's example, I wonder how we might see those experiences and connections as opportunities for the gospel? Our own 'mission field' can provide God-given opportunities, and encourages us to review what these might be and to step out in faith to see how the doors open for the message of the gospel.

And so with those challenges, our brief study of Acts comes to an end. However, you and I are here as Christians in 2020, because the story doesn't end here. As Tom Wright concludes: 'Jesus of Nazareth, Messiah and Lord: through His servants, through their journeys and their trails, through their pains, their puzzles and their sufferings and their shipwrecks, still reaches out into the future, out beyond Rome and the first century, out across the tracts of time and geography, still confronting men, women and children, rulers, disabled people, local authorities, artisans, governors of islands, wandering tentmakers, philosophers in the market place, and young men nodding off on windowsills. Luke has brought them all before us, in a dazzling display both of writing and of theology, drawing us in, reminding us once more that this is a drama in which we ourselves have been called to belong to the cast. The journey is ours, the trials and vindications are ours, the sovereign presence of Jesus is ours, the story is ours to pick up and carry on. Luke's writing, like Paul's journey, has reached its end, but in his end is our beginning.'

And so our journey continues in this peculiar chapter of the coronavirus outbreak, and our witness to Jesus, in this the 21st century. Jesus is still Messiah and Lord, and is reaching out to us and through us to touch the lives of those around us, in every walk of life – to bring hope, new life and the promise of a glorious future.

Let's pray ...

In these coming weeks we shall be basing our sermon thoughts on the lectionary readings leading into Holy week and Easter, and looking forward with hope, and resurrection life!