

Confidence

Acts 27-28

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Last Sunday, Ben shared with us how Paul had the opportunity to share the gospel of Christ with a Jewish mob, the Jewish governing body of the Sanhedrin, the Procurator (or Roman civil law judge) of Judaea named Felix, then his replacement Festus, and also before the Jewish Roman-puppet governor of Judea King Agrippa. This King Agrippa by the way was the grandson of Herod the Great who tried to kill Jesus at His birth and the son of Herod Antipas who killed John the Baptist and was complicit in the crucifixion of Jesus.

If you were to characterize the manner in which Paul spoke the good news of Jesus to the mob and the various rulers over him, it would be boldly, with confidence. The theme of the last two chapters of Acts that stands out to me is confidence. In fact, this could apply to all of the book of Acts as a sub-theme where the gospel was shared by witnesses boldly in all sorts of challenging situations.

What made the difference in the disciples of Jesus between when they cowered behind locked doors in fear of their lives following the crucifixion of Jesus and when Peter and John defied the Sanhedrin to teach in the name of Jesus? Their being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. As Jesus promised in...

Acts 1:8 – you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Certainly, the prayer of the church during the earliest days according to Acts 4:29 was...

Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word

God answered that prayer immediately for following the prayer,

Acts 4:31 says – the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

So, when Paul spoke before various groups and the rulers over him, He too was a beneficiary of that prayer for boldness made possible by the Holy Spirit in Him. As Jesus promised the power of the Holy Spirit when He commissioned His disciples to be His witnesses, that power and commissioning applies to us today as well. The confidence in sharing the good news of Christ that the disciples displayed in the book of Acts should give us confidence to go and do likewise.

Now, as we look at the last two chapters of Acts, we see Paul displaying exceptional courage in multiple life threatening situations. His courage was another form of confidence applied to how he responded to what made the people around him very fearful. We're not going to read all this but I'll summarize it for you and point out some key verses which tells the story.

At the beginning of Chapter 27, we learn the ruling authorities decide to send Paul to Rome since he had appealed to Caesar. Paul had been in Caesarea for 2 years because of the indecision about what to do with him. The Roman authorities had not found anything wrong with him but didn't want to offend the Jews who had accused him. Sound familiar? ... The same political dynamics is what sent Jesus to the cross. Paul could make his appeal to Caesar because he was a Roman citizen by birth having parents who were Roman citizens in Tarsus, a city in what is now called Turkey, a Roman province.

Paul was put under the authority of Julius, a centurion who had a mission to take condemned criminals to Rome where they would die in the arena. The modern U.S. Army equivalent to a Roman centurion is a company commander who would generally hold the rank of Captain and be over about 100 soldiers. Paul was something of a special case because he was not convicted of any crime but nonetheless was considered a prisoner who would have a trial before Caesar.

Since Paul really wasn't a condemned criminal, and probably also due to his godly character, Julius allowed him a couple traveling companions... Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, and Luke who wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts (notice the reference to "us" in verse 2 and beyond). It is likely Luke intended the record in the Book of Acts to be used as eye witness testimony to exonerate Paul.

The ship they were on was an Alexandrian freighter taking grain from Egypt to Italy. The typical grain freighter of that period was 140 feet long and 36 feet wide with one mast and a big square sail. This would have been before the innovation of a weighted keel and fixed rudder which meant Paul's ship couldn't sail into the wind. We learn from Acts 27:37 that there were 276 persons on the ship including the sailors, soldiers, and prisoners.

The ship began to make its way west, eventually coming to the port called Fair Havens on the south side of the island of Crete in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, about half way to Rome. Verse 9 says that *"sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over."* The Fast here referred to the Day of Atonement so it would have been early October in A.D. 59. The point is that as winter approached, the weather became more dangerous for sailing.

In verse 10, Paul advised them, saying, *"Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives."* Paul wasn't speaking here as a prophet of God, but as an experienced traveler on the Mediterranean Sea, having already traveled some 3,500 miles by sea and having some experience with shipwrecks. 2 Corinthians 11:25 tells us that by this time, Paul had already been shipwrecked three times. He, like most everyone involved, knew that sailing in this time of the year was dangerous.

Verse 11 says, *"Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul."* It wasn't a surprise that the centurion had more respect for the opinion of the chief sailor and the owner of the ship than for Paul's opinion. They both had much to lose if the ship didn't make it to Rome.

The harbor they arrived at on Crete was named Fair Havens which was something of a misnomer. The orientation of the bay made it vulnerable to winter winds and storms. And the crew of the ship didn't look forward to several months in a small town. The local Chamber of Commerce must have named the place "Fair Havens." It was probably previously known as Murphyville or something.

So, they set out for Phoenix, a much better harbor to spend the winter on Crete and only about 40 miles away. This kind of sounds like the theme song for Gilligan's Island... "Five passengers set sail that day for a three-hour tour, a three-hour tour." They had a favorable wind to start but *a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon.* This wind was too strong to continue under sail so they struck it and the ship was driven westward down wind. On the third day of this wind, they lightened the ship by throwing their spare heavy equipment overboard. And after several more days they began to lose hope they'd be saved.

Paul reminded them they would not be in this mess if they had listened to him then encouraged them saying in verse 22, *I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.* ²³ *For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve,* ²⁴ *saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.'* ²⁵ *Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.* ²⁶ *However, we must run aground on a certain island."*

Paul already knew he would survive and make it to Rome because the Lord appeared to him one night when he was in Jerusalem and said in Acts 23:11, *"Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."* But God blessed him by promising all who sailed with him would also survive. God didn't reveal to Paul all the details of what they'd go through like the name of the island they'd land on; but He revealed just enough to give them courage if they trusted Him as Paul did.

Notice that Paul said in verse 25: *"I believe God."* He didn't say, "I believe in God." Every demon destined for hell believes in the existence of God. Paul declared his total confidence in God's knowledge of his situation and His promises. Paul trusted God and that gave him courage to face the storm at sea and boldly encourage his traveling companions.

On the 14th night of being *driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea* the sailors had a sense they were nearing land which they confirmed with soundings. They dropped anchors for fear of running aground on the rocks which didn't help enough so the sailors prepared to abandon ship in the skiff. In verse 31, *Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved."*³² *Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off.*

There were probably two reasons Paul knew they had to stay together. First, the ship's passengers desperately needed the crew's expertise, and it would be fatal if the crew abandoned the passengers. Second, Paul probably sensed that God's promise to give him the lives of the whole ship's company assumed that they would stay together. I find it interesting that the soldiers trusted Paul's wisdom in this matter. Paul's unshakable confidence in God made him a leader among men, even though he was a prisoner of Rome.

Paul urged everyone to eat for strength because they had spent several days without food. He led them in taking bread and giving thanks to God. Then they further lightened the ship throwing their cargo of wheat out to sea. This reflected their great desperation; it was a struggle for survival.

When the day broke, they could see the land and there was a bay with a beach downwind so they cut their anchors free and hoisted their sail. But they struck a reef before they could make it to shore and the waves threatened to break up their ship. Since they'd have to abandon the ship, the soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners thinking they'd escape. According to Roman military law a guard who allowed his prisoner to escape was subject to the same penalty the escaped prisoner would have suffered — in the case of most of these prisoners, that would be death.

But Verse 43 says: *the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land.* The rest would use boards from the ship as floatation so that they *all escaped safely to land.*

On to Chapter 28... The shipwreck survivors discovered from the natives who showed them *unusual kindness* that they were on Malta. They built a fire for them because of the rain and cold. Then verse 3 says: *when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand.* The natives were very familiar with this type of snake and expected Paul to quickly die. They knew he was a prisoner of Rome and rationalized his snake-bite must have been due to his being a murder and thus was receiving divine justice. But Paul just shook off the snake *into the fire and suffered no harm.* When Paul didn't *swell up or suddenly fall down dead... they changed their minds [about him] and said that he was a god* in verse 6.

How would you react if a rattlesnake chomped down on your hand? Most people would faint from fright. I recall having a watch-out-for-snakes safety briefing at a ROTC summer training in Fort Riley, Kansas where they told of a cadet from a previous year who was so freaked about snakes that when a stick slapped him on the leg while he was crossing a stream, he thought he'd been snake-bit. This caused him to pass out from hyperventilation so they called a helicopter to evacuate him. Of course, they found no evidence he'd been snake-bit at the hospital. Being stick-bit is rarely lethal.

Paul had confidence that he'd make it to Rome despite having a venomous viper hanging from his hand because Jesus had promised him and that confidence gave him courage.

Later, Paul healed the father *of the leading citizen of the island* and others were healed following that as well. Per verse 11, they ended up spending three months on Malta then boarded another ship that would take them to Rome making various stops on the Italian coast along the way. At a couple of the stops, they encountered fellow Christians and verse 15 says, *when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.*

Why would meeting up with fellow Christians encourage Paul? It is encouraging to meet up with family. It is likely they knew Paul from his letter to the Romans a few years before. It is encouraging to see God working... it reinforces God's promises and shows that as Christians we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

Verse 16, when they arrived at Rome, *the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.*

Paul wasn't in Rome three days before he arranged a meeting with *the leaders of the Jews*. This was his pattern, sharing the gospel with *the Jew first and also for the Greek* per Romans 1:16. He made his case to the Roman Jews explaining why he had appealed to Caesar in verse 20: *because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain*. The hope of Israel was the coming of the Messiah whom he was proclaiming. The Jews told Paul that his accusers in Jerusalem had made no effort to make their case before Caesar or even to the Jews in Rome. But they knew in general about how the Christianity sect was condemned by the Jews everywhere.

Verse 23, *So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.*

When Paul spoke to the Jews of the *kingdom of God*, don't think that he was referring to the spiritual kingdom of the Church Age. The *kingdom of God* was what the Jews looked forward to when the Messiah would deliver Israel from their Gentile oppressors and Israel would become the most preeminent nation on earth with the Lord Himself ruling from Jerusalem. That is why the Jews failed to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. When it became clear that Jesus had not come to deliver them from the tyranny of Rome, they thought He couldn't be the Messiah.

There is plenty of evidence in the Old Testament that the Messiah would suffer for us as our spiritual deliverer before He'd return as Israel's political Savior. Paul would have certainly cited these passages to make his case that Jesus was the Messiah. The good news of the Kingdom of God is that they could still see that by embracing Jesus as their personal Messiah. Paul likely told them of our blessed hope where Jesus promised to return and establish the physical Kingdom of God on earth the Jews eagerly anticipated.

Paul's message *persuaded* some, but others *disbelieved*. They departed after Paul explained why not all of them believed by quoting Isaiah 6:9-10, starting in verse 26...

'Go to this people and say: "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive;"²⁷ For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."

He further explained in verse 28...

Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!

The last two verses in the book of Acts summarize the time Paul spent under guard in Rome:

Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him,³¹ preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

I see significance in this reference to the confidence of Paul in the last verse of Acts. Certainly, he had demonstrated such confidence in the good news of Christ that he braved all manner of challenges in his missionary journeys, in speaking before angry mobs and before rulers who had the power to execute him, and even in the face of storms at sea and snakes in the firewood.

Alright, how do we apply the confidence of Paul and the other first century disciples of Christ to our own lives today?

What gives you confidence to speak boldly of Jesus with those who do not know Him?

- When I'm asked a question about my faith which shows me the Holy Spirit is working on their heart. This can come from planting or watering a seed but usually as a result of me asking them questions about what they believe and why they believe it.
- Remembering the promises of God such as: John 3:16 – *God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

What are some promises of God that can help grow our confidence?

2 Corinthians 12:9 – *But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.*

2 Timothy 1:7 – *For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.*

Ephesians 3:12 – *In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.*

Hebrews 4:16 – *Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

Hebrews 13:6 – *So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?”*

Isaiah 32:17 – *The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence forever.*

Isaiah 40:31 – *but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*

How can we encourage fellow Christians who lack confidence due to doubts?

Mark 9:24 – *“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief”* is at once a statement of faith and an admission that our faith is far from perfect. Jesus helped the man’s unbelief by healing his child suffering from convulsions. So, the principle here is to ask God for help with what is causing us to doubt Him. The promise of James 1:5 applies:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

I recall that when I was a new Christian, I’d have various questions on my mind that I hadn’t even prayed to God about but God supernaturally answered these questions by my listening to a sermon that made reference to a passage of Scripture that was being used in a totally different context but nonetheless answered my question.

I also remember a time as a brand-new Christian when I questioned the sovereignty of God thinking that there were some things that God just didn’t care about. Since I was an electrical engineer, I applied the three relevant states of a digital signal as One, Zero, or “don’t care.” When I mentioned this to Teresa, she made it clear that God cared about every detail which sent me back to God’s Word to discover the truth.

There was another time as a new Christian when I struggled with whether to take the Genesis account of creation literally or apply an interpretation making it compatible with the theory of evolution. But God directed me to some great resources citing abundant evidence supporting a literal interpretation of Genesis. That resulted in a great spiritual growth spurt for me... I no longer had to seek some scholarly intermediary to explain what God meant by what He said in His Word, I could read it for myself and His Spirit would help me understand it.

Consequently, I highly recommend the Institute for Creation Research and Answers in Genesis.

A great Internet resource for doubters and for those seeking to help doubters I like using is GotQuestions.org ...for example:

- Why does God allow evil? Summary: We are made in God’s image so we have free will. God allows evil so that through it He can bring about a greater good. The presence of evil often draws people to Him which is also a greater good.