

ALWAYS ON MISSION

Acts 28:17-28

If you have some spare time, what do you do with that discretionary resource? If you meet someone and have an opportunity to talk with them, what is typically the subject of your conversation eventually? For example, everyone talks about the weather. That is sort of a neutral topic or it used to be. If the subject of weather comes up, it could go in several different directions such as global warming and what can be done about it. That might open up a lot of different possibilities ranging from Al Gore to limiting carbon emissions and debates over whether people or natural occurrences have the most influence. That could lead to alternative energy sources and the use of solar panels on roofs with everyone generating their own electricity or it might lead to how much worse the hurricanes and floods and fires and other things are now than they used to be.

Where does the conversation go from here? It could be that the crazy weather is limiting your golf game and then you could discuss golf which might lead to other sports and then wind up talking about football. Another possibility might be that the crazy weather could be that God is trying to get our attention and get us to return to a situation where we embrace morality and not accept an “anything goes” kind of lifestyle. If we were having a conversation with the Apostle Paul, where do you think the conversation would wind up? That’s an easy question to answer since we know that he was always on mission. There are some people who always move a conversation toward golf and some toward football and some toward politics. It comes down to what is important to us.

The Apostle Paul was this way about the Kingdom of God. He took every opportunity and even created some opportunities to tell people about the Kingdom of God. It did not matter if he were free or in prison, he told people about Jesus. It did not matter if the audiences were Jew or Greek, he told people about Jesus. He did not just wait for someone to come to him, he actively went out looking for people to share the good news about what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. He did not hesitate to tell kings and governors about the love of God and His salvation. God offers salvation to everyone, but only those who by faith receive God’s salvation in Jesus Christ will be saved.

The Journey – 28:17-20

¹⁷ After three days Paul called together those who were the leading men of the Jews, and when they came together, he began saying to them, “Brethren, 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. ¹⁸ “And when they had examined me, they were willing to release me because there was no ground for putting me to death. ¹⁹ “But when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar, not that I had any accusation against my nation. ²⁰ “For this reason, therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you, for I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel.” Acts 28:17–20 (NASB95)

Paul had been imprisoned in Caesarea for a couple of year and had appealed his case to Caesar to prevent being sent back to Jerusalem where the Jews had planned to kill him. Most of us are familiar with Paul’s journey to Rome: the bad weather, the ship wreck, the miracles on the island of Melita, and his eventually being taken to Rome. Even though he was under arrest and had a guard with him, he was allowed to rent a house and live in comparative comfort with freedom to have visitors.

Paul took advantage of this situation to again proclaim the gospel. After being in Rome only three days, he invited the Jewish leaders in Rome to come to his house. Paul told them about what had happened that led to his being arrested and how he had appealed to Caesar. He

told them that it was because he believed in the "Hope of Israel" that he was in chains.

It is likely that Paul told them more than Luke recorded here of why he was taken into custody by the Romans that led to him being held under house arrest in Rome. We recall the account that the last time Paul was in Jerusalem the Jews from Asia had accused Paul of teaching Jews that they should not adhere to the traditional practices and rituals that were characteristic of their culture and also accused him of bringing a Gentile into the temple in Jerusalem. None of these accusations were true and Paul reassured the Jewish leaders in Rome that he honored and practiced the customs of Israel. My guess is that he did not tell them that he believed that God's salvation did not require such practices and rituals.

The Seekers – 28:21-24

²¹ They said to him, "We have neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren come here and reported or spoken anything bad about you. ²² "But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere." ²³ When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. ²⁴ Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe. Acts 28:21–24 (NASB95)

The Jewish leaders denied knowing anything official about the incident and had not heard anything from Jerusalem about Paul. News traveled slowly in those days and there may have been no reason for the Jews in Jerusalem to tell others outside of the area. It had been more than two years since the incident in the temple that led to Paul's arrest and most people (except the leaders that wanted to kill Paul) may have forgotten about it.

Some have suggested that the Jewish leaders in Rome were being careful to be neutral and they may have been parsing their carefully chosen words in that "no letters had been received" about Paul and "no one had come from Judea and spoken negatively about Paul." It is unlikely that they did not know about the controversy and they were likely aware of what Paul had been doing in taking the gospel message to parts of Asia and Europe.

The group that came to visit Paul said that they wanted to hear more about Christianity (which they referred to as a sect). The Greek word for "sect" is "haireisis" from which the English word heresy is derived. Their opinion of Christianity was not very favorable. What they had heard about it was all negative. We should not assume that these Jewish leaders were unaware of Christianity since there were Christians living in Rome and it was likely that many of these were Jewish believers. It has also been speculated that the synagogue leaders who initially met with Paul wanted to let Paul "incriminate" himself with his own testimony rather than relying on hearsay from other people. They could logically predict that many of the Jews and proselytes in their congregations would eventually hear more about this sect and their intent in bringing many others to hear Paul was so that they could hear about this heresy first hand.

There is a lot of negativism associated with Christianity today because there are people who take the name of Christian and do not have Christ. The charlatan preachers who are in it for the money and the shysters that have "arranged healings and miracles" give a bad name to the cause of Christ among those who do not know Him. The world is quick to criticize and to put all Christians in the category of the worst examples they can find.

Paul succeeded in getting many of the Jews to come a second meeting to hear about the Kingdom of God. He spent all day with that group and he used the Old Testament scriptures from the law of Moses to the prophets to prove that Jesus was God's Messiah. There were probably questioning and sharing of opinions by the Jews. The bottom line was that some

believed and some did not believe.

If we share the gospel with various people, even today, the bottom line is that some will believe and others will not. Many times we use the fact that “people will not believe” as an excuse to not witness to others. What we tend to forget is that our responsibility is to share the good news and what others do with the facts is something for which they will have to answer. Paul had encountered mixed responses before; however, this did not deter him from carrying out the Lord’s command.

The Response – 28:25-28

²⁵ And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, “The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, ²⁶ saying, ‘GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY, “YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; ²⁷ FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES; OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.” ’ ²⁸ “Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen.” Acts 28:25–28 (NASB95)

The Jews who came to hear Paul debated the matter among themselves, some believing and some not believing. This rejection of the gospel by many of those who heard it was (to Paul) evidence of the continuing fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. Isaiah saw the Jews of his day as a rebellious and stubborn people. Historically, the Israelites had routinely rejected what God had commanded them to do. Even today, among many other people, by constantly rejecting God’s leading and the conviction of the Holy Spirit, people do become hardened and even though they hear the gospel message on a regular basis, they don’t really accept it. As a result, a lot of people are soul sick and spiritually dead.

God’s plan of salvation in Jesus Christ is no less important just because the Jews rejected it. God so loved the world that He makes His salvation available to all people – Jews and Gentiles. Paul wanted the Jews to know that the Kingdom of God was still a reality even though they rejected it. God’s plan and purpose will come to pass whether we are a part of it or not. It is by His grace that He has included you and me in His kingdom.

After Isaiah had given those prophetic words to the Jews around 700 BC they did not respond with any semblance of turning back to God and around 600 BC they found themselves conquered and being taken as captives to Babylon where they spend seventy years. After they had been warned by Isaiah, the judgment of which Moses had spoken about regarding the consequences of continued disobedience and rejection of the truth came to pass in about one hundred years.

Paul had presented the Gospel message to the Jews in Jerusalem in AD 60 and had then presented it to the Jewish leaders in the largest city in the world around AD 62. This latter group was also reminded of the prophetic words of Isaiah and within a decade God’s judgment had again fallen upon Jerusalem and the temple which confirmed their rejection of God’s covenant with those who continued to reject the truth and to disrespect God’s ultimate revelation of Himself to them. They failed to realize that Christianity is the true fulfillment and perfecting of the old revelation. From that truth we can conclude that Christians are the true Israel of God.

Physical Israel had missed the point of why God had chosen them as a special people through whom God would reveal Himself to the world and bring about a restoration (read that salvation) of mankind. He had told them that they would be blessed so that they would be a blessing to others. The objective or mission for the church is to take the message of God’s salvation in Christ to all the world. On an individual basis, what do most Christians really have as their mission in life?