

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

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CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

THE WORD OF GOD IS NOT BOUND

(Acts 28:17-31)

OUTLINE

Key verse - 28

Paul a prisoner at Rome - allowed to remain in lodging - then in hired dwelling - Rome a great city - Nero cruel - Paul began witnessing at once - opening testimony to Jews - then to Gentiles - audiences grew - Jewish enemies could not hinder him - he preached a full Gospel at the center of the world.

1. Enthusiasm for Christ will not permit the wasting of time in beginning Christian work.
2. Other Christians are encouraged by our courage when under trial.
3. It is an honor to be bound for Christ's sake.
4. The unpopularity of the Gospel does not warrant our rejection of it.
5. The true church of Christ will be ultimately vindicated (22).
6. A thorough knowledge of the Bible is essential to effective preaching (23).
7. The Gospel divides the hearers (24).
8. Continual rejection of Christ meets with certain doom (26, 27).
9. The Gospel of Christ cannot be bound (30, 31; II Timothy 2:9).

At the close of our last study we left Paul in a peculiar position, a prisoner at Rome, and yet allowed to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him. He was an old man by this time. He described himself as "**Paul the aged**" (Philemon 9). He was, in all probability, sixty years of age, and considering his thirty years of hard service, his many journeys and hardships, we would naturally suppose that he looked older than he was.

COULD SEE FRIENDS

Paul was held at least two years at Rome as prisoner before his trial was completed. At first he lived in what was called a "**lodging**" (verse 23), and later, in what was evidently more commodious quarters, "**his own hired house**" (verse 30). As the number of disciples grew and the Gentiles became interested in the Gospel, a larger number would come to hear him and consult with him, and he would need a larger building in order to accommodate them.

Just how he was able to pay for this house we are not told, but he probably worked as formerly and earned money himself. The Christians would no doubt contribute to his wants as we know the people of Philippi did.

IN CHAINS

Paul is often pictured as holding out his hands with the chains dangling from his wrists. This may be true, but it is not the picture which he himself gives us in this passage. He says: **“because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain”** (Acts 28:20). The chain was apparently fastened around his body rather than around his wrists. This might not be more comfortable, but it would give him more freedom in speaking, or working, or writing.

ROME

The city of Rome was at that time a great city of perhaps two million inhabitants half of whom were slaves. The tradesmen and professional class were slaves. There was a large class of the population which did nothing; they were simply loungers about the city. The most of the freemen were too proud to work even though they might be poor.

NERO

The emperor who was upon the throne was Nero. He was at that time only about twenty-four or twenty-five years of age, yet he had already begun that course of action which has left his name a synonym for cruelty. The example which was set before Nero had possibly more to do with his wanton disregard of the values of life than his education. He was educated by Seneca, the philosopher, but his mother is said to have poisoned her husband, Claudius, in order to set her son upon the throne. Agrippina had married Claudius after the birth of her son Nero, and Germanicus, the son of Claudius, was a rival for the throne, therefore he also was poisoned. Thus at the very beginning of his public career Nero had an example set before him which was afterward to be most marked in his life. He was comparatively mild in his rule at first under the advice of Seneca and Burrus. But after a few years he murdered his mother, and also, it is said, his wife Octavia. From that time on his life was one of horrid cruelty and shameless vice.

ART DID NOT SOFTEN HIS CRUELTY

True, Nero was a student of the poets and could quote them with ease. He was also a student of music and art and was often found in the studios as well as in the theatres; but his character was not purified by these any more than was the character of the silversmiths at Ephesus. We shudder at the very thought of the cruelties in which he delighted. It is thought that he himself set Rome on fire and then accused the Christians of doing it in order to turn the people against them. He covered the bodies of Christians in pitch and set them up in burning rows in order to amuse the public in Rome. Such was the nature of the monster before whom Paul was awaiting trial. Paul, however, was not frightened or afraid to give his testimony in the Imperial city, even in the presence of the emperor and members of the royal household.

PAUL'S OPENING TESTIMONY

Paul had been in Rome but three days when he invited the Jewish leaders first in order that he might explain to them why he was a prisoner. He told them that he had done nothing against the customs of the fathers and that those who had examined him in Jerusalem and Caesarea had found him to be innocent. It was because of the continued opposition of the Jews that he had been compelled to appeal to Caesar. He had nothing of which to accuse his nation. The sole reason why he had been accused and was now a prisoner was that he had held that the hope of Israel had been fulfilled, that is, that the MESSIAH had already come. The Jews replied that they had not received any letters from Judaea concerning him, and none of the brethren who had come from there had anything against him. This was true, not because the Jews had forgiven Paul, but either because they knew they had no case to present to Caesar, or that they had not yet had time to reach Rome. When they had accused him before he was sent to Rome, all the Roman officials had declared that, so far as they could see, he was innocent.

TO THE JEWS

The Jews at Rome said they wanted to hear Paul speak concerning this Nazarene heresy. The word which they used, translated, "sect," means heresy, or heretical sect. They knew that it was generally spoken against, but many of them knew little about it at first hand and wanted to hear what the great leader of this heresy had to say concerning it. There was a large Jewish section on the opposite side of the city from where Paul was kept, across the Tiber, and most of the Jews had been there but a few years, because Tiberius Caesar had banished a large number of Jews from the city and Claudius had banished them all. As Nero had been on the throne but six years at this time, the Jewish population there was but recently settled. They had no doubt come from every quarter of the world. There were Christians in Rome at the time Paul arrived, but as the Jewish dissensions had been the cause of their banishment some years before, they would no doubt keep very quiet in their worship and meetings. Hence we may not be surprised that many of the Jews did not know much about them except that they were disliked at Rome as well as in other places.

Paul lost no time in giving them an opportunity to hear him. He allowed them to set a day which was suitable when they could gather at his lodging to hear him. He spent the whole day in attempting to convince them. It is likely that he gave them much of the argument which we have in the book of the Hebrews and reminded them of much that he had written in his letter to the Romans. He took up the law and the prophets and showed them how both were fulfilled in Christ. He was able to convince some, but many did not believe. Those who did would infer from the prophecy which he quoted, which is to the effect that they would not accept the truth because their eyes, ears and hearts were closed: **"And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed"** (Isaiah 6:9-10).

TO THE GENTILES

When the Jews would not hear, Paul, as was his custom, turned to the Gentiles. They would hear with less prejudice and more of them would receive the truth. His audiences grew and he was able to rent a house which would accommodate them, where he remained for two years, receiving all who came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, none forbidding him.

WHAT BECAME OF PAUL

We have been following Paul for two and a half years on his way to Rome to be tried before Caesar. Now, after he reaches Rome, we have hardly a word about his trial. The record is concerned mainly with his preaching. All beyond this record and a few hints found in the Epistles, is mere conjecture concerning the outcome of his trial. We suppose he was released and went on another missionary tour. If so he was likely imprisoned again at Rome, this time to die. Tradition tells us that he was beheaded about three miles outside of the city of Rome.

HIS PREACHING

We are told all that is important for us to know. The details of the trial would not help us. The account of the trial would only turn our minds away from the important message which the Spirit would leave with us. We are interested in Paul, but the Spirit would have us to be interested in him only so far as he points us to Christ. The thought that is left with us is that the kingdom of Jesus Christ and His saving grace was preached at the center of the world and nothing could hinder it. We are told enough to know that Paul was innocent, and that his faith did not fail under trial. Knowing that, we may properly turn from Paul, great hero though he was, to Jesus Christ and His Gospel for a lost world; for that was manifestly our Lord's intention, and it would also be Paul's desire.

HIS CONTENTMENT

Paul as a prisoner at Rome was not morose; he was contented and happy. We learn this from his writings during his imprisonment. Even when some tried to irritate him by preaching Christ for the purpose of arousing contention, not preaching sincerely, he said:

“Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice” (Philippians 1:15-18). Paul was not exhorting the Philippians to do what he was not doing himself when he said:

“Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4).

At the same time he wrote: **“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”** (Philippians 4:11-13). He himself must have experienced that spirit of contentment, which he would have others enjoy, before he wrote:

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you” (Philippians 4:6-9).

HIS CHARACTER

Chains and accusations did not make Paul a criminal. He might have been set free had it not been for the prejudice of the Jews and their efforts to take his life because he preached Christ. His constant aim was to show that he was not against Israel but for her. His people had looked for many centuries for the coming of a Messiah who would be the hope of Israel. Now that that hope had been fulfilled the Jews should not accuse Paul of heresy or of disrupting the nation; rather, he was the herald of the day for which they hoped, waited and prayed. Whether they accepted Paul or rejected him would not change the facts. If they would examine his career, along with the Scriptures which he expounded, they would find that he was a true and correct expositor of Scripture. Luke and Aristarchus, who had been with him during his recent trials, and much of the time during his work and travels, would gladly testify to the purity and worthiness of his character, and how God had testified by signs and miracles to his message and faith. Aquilla and Priscilla would also be able to testify that they had lived with Paul and had found him to be an exemplary character, and a man whom they had learned to love so much that they were willing to lay down their lives for him. The people of Rome knew that these friends of Paul were among the best of the community, and whatever one might say of their religion no one could doubt their honesty. All this served to give Paul a good hearing. The Jews said they wanted to learn from his own lips just what this sect to which he belonged stood for and what the basis of Scripture was upon which it claimed to stand. Let us now turn to some of the lessons of this interesting paragraph.

NO TIME TO BE WASTED

Enthusiasm for Christ will not permit the wasting of time in beginning Christian work. Within three days Paul had plans ready for beginning work even while a prisoner. He called the Jews together and so interested them that they asked to hear his message. He appointed a day upon which they came together in great numbers to hear him expound the Gospel.

Paul usually went to where the people were, but when he was so limited that he could not go to them he did not give up or waste time in lamentation; he called them to meet with him. A man of less enthusiasm would have found many excuses which he would have put forward as reasons for inaction. It is difficult to find a parallel in all history of a prisoner who continued to be so great a missionary.

William Carey had often unburdened his soul to his brother ministers or preached to his little congregation, but they merely listened with respectful interest and did nothing. On May 31, 1792, he preached a thrilling sermon, on Isaiah 54:2, 3, at Nottingham: **“Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.”** He urged the people to expect great things from God and to attempt great things for God. One has said of it: “If all the people had lifted up their voices and wept, I should not have wondered. But the people did not weep! They did not even wait. They arose to leave as usual.” Then William Carey could wait no longer, but stepping down from the pulpit as he saw the people quietly dispersing, he seized Andrew Fuller’s hand and wrung it in an agony of distress. “Are we not going to do anything?” he demanded, “Oh, Fuller, call them back! Call them back! We dare not separate without doing anything.” As a result of that passionate entreaty the first missionary society was founded and Mr. Carey was chosen as their first missionary.

Dr. Thomas Guthrie tells of a great French general who reached the battlefield at sundown only to find that his troops had been worsted in the fight. Unskillful arrangements had neutralized Gallic bravery, and offered the enemy advantages they were not slow to seize. He accosted the unfortunate commander. Having rapidly learned how matters stood, he pulled out his watch, turned his eye on the sinking sun, and said, “There’s time yet to gain the victory.” He rallied the broken ranks. He placed himself at their head, and launching them, with the arm of a giant in war upon the columns of the foe, he plucked the prize from their hands and won the day.

How much fewer would be the defeats and how many more would be the victories if all Christian leaders had the ardent enthusiasm of men such as Paul and William Carey! Even though the hour of the day may be late; even though life may be mostly spent and the span remaining short, let us do God’s service today! Let us preach the Gospel to dying men! Let us call upon them to repent today!

OUR COURAGE ENCOURAGES OTHERS

Other Christians are encouraged by our courage when under trial. Paul tells us in one of the letters which he wrote during his imprisonment at Rome: **“So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear”** (Philippians 1:13, 14). Most of the Christians became more confident as a result of his bonds, and more bold to speak the Word of God without fear. When they saw that Nero and the Roman guard did not frighten Paul, they began to have more courage to teach the Gospel among their friends and throughout the city.

It has always been true that one courageous Christian helps many others. He is to them like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. Peter and John encouraged the other disciples when they said to the officers who tried to silence them, **“Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard”** (Acts 4:19-20).

When Commodore Joseph Smith saw by the first dispatch that reached Washington from Fortress Monroe that the “Congress,” on which his son was commander, had shown the white flag, he said, “Then Joe’s dead!” It was so. It is easier to imagine men like Daniel dying at their post of duty, faithful and without a blot on their fair names, than to think of them betraying their trust, or in any way proving unfaithful. No doubt there were many who would have the courage to pray in Babylon after they had witnessed the courage of Daniel and his protection by Almighty God.

AN HONOR TO BE BOUND FOR CHRIST

It is an honor to be bound for Christ’s sake. Paul said: **“because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain”** (Acts 28:20). If Paul had not witnessed boldly for Christ he would not have been bound and a prisoner as he was. We see Paul vindicated. We look upon him as an honored apostle. But in that day he was looked upon by men generally as a convict. It would not be so easy for him to keep up a spirit of honor and courage under the depressing circumstances. It is under such circumstances that we need the help of the God of peace to keep our minds and hearts through Christ Jesus.

We do not think less of John Knox today because he was made to serve as a slave and was bound with a chain in the French Galleys. We do not think less of Patrick Hamilton because he was bound with a chain to the stake and burned to death. We honor these men because they kept their faith though subjected to such ignominy. When we see men suffer for Christ, or if we ourselves may be called to suffer for His sake, let us, like Paul, count it all joy that we are counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ.

There are many lesser ways in which men feel that they are bound today and are not free to do the larger things that they would like to do for Christ. There is many a godly mother who is held at home because of the family which she is rearing; there is many a father who is kept busy with his work at the shop or on the farm; there is many a daughter who cares for an aged mother or father; there is many a son who is kept at home to help provide for the family, who would like to be released for some apparently larger and more noted work for the Lord.

Let all such remember that there is a way for them to honor God through their testimony in the place where they are. Let us not lament because of our chains but let us serve God more earnestly even while we are bound with them. As with Paul, it is possible for you to have a great sphere of influence as your example and testimony go out from the place where you are. Honor God at all times and in all places wherever you may be regardless of your limitations. God will take care of your honor and your reward.

HOLD TO UNPOPULAR GOSPEL

The unpopularity of the Gospel does not warrant our rejection of it. The Jews at Rome said to Paul: “**as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against**” (Acts 28:22). The value and permanence of the Christian religion is settled by the truth, not by the people who speak against us. One of the things that has kept the church pure is that, all through history, it has been so generally spoken against. When the church of Christ is unpopular men do not join it for the sake of name or fame, and those who join are usually men of conviction. When the church, in any locality, becomes popular it is more in danger of being corrupted from within.

THE TRUE CHURCH ULTIMATELY VINDICATED

The true church of Christ will be ultimately vindicated (20). It may be called a sect, as it was by the Jews at Rome, but it is not a sect. The true church consists of a body of Christian people called out from the world by Jesus Christ. The people of God will ever live. The church will never die.

Paul showed, when the opportunity was given, that the Christians were followers of the true MESSIAH who had been the hope of Israel. He proved that those who held this so-called heresy were not heretics, but a part of the true Israel of God, as he had already pointed out in the letter which he had written to Rome before he came. He showed them that the one whom they called the Nazarene, whom they had been taught to despise, was the one who should sit upon the throne of David and was the true King of Israel. He was the Son of God, the head of the church, and would see that nothing, not even the gates of hell, should prevail against her.

The many centuries through which the church of Christ has stood until the present time is a vindication of her stability. There are still those, who have not profited by Voltaire’s mistakes and, who insist that the Christian religion will not endure through many years. The church, which has been growing through nineteen centuries until it has spread into almost every nation of the world, may be safely trusted to continue until the end of time. If we had nothing more than the promise of God we might, like Abraham, safely rest upon that alone; but we have evidence, which accumulates with every century, that nothing can destroy her.

PREACHER NEEDS KNOWLEDGE OF BIBLE

A thorough knowledge of the Bible is essential to effective preaching: “**And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening**” (Acts 28:23). Paul expounded the law and the prophets from morning until evening. He would, no doubt, point out how the sacrifices were types of Christ. He would show that the whole ceremonial worship pointed to Christ. He would tell them that they had entertained a false view of the Messiah; that he had not come to set up a kingdom upon earth, but that as the sacrifice was slain upon the altar so He was to be offered as a sacrifice upon the Cross.

He would explain the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah as they had never heard it explained before, and show how the life and trial of Christ were pictured there hundreds of years before He came in the likeness of man. Paul would explain to them, that though they had an order of priests and a high priest, Christ was the great HIGH PRIEST who was to take the place of all priests from that time forward. He would show them that they had a better altar, a better temple, a better sacrifice, a better intercessor, a better mercy seat, and more efficacious blood to wash away their sins.

Jesus had begun at Moses and expounded through all the prophets, as He walked with two of His disciples, the things concerning Himself. The Spirit had revealed all of these arguments to Paul who was continually trying to convince his own people by reproducing them. Through nineteen hundred years since that time those arguments have been repeated in the effort to convince men that Jesus is the Christ. Paul knew his Bible well and without it he could not have been the effective preacher that he was. The great text book of every preacher is the Word of God and without a full and intimate knowledge of it he cannot be an effective minister of God.

Paul testified of the kingdom of God and also persuaded them concerning Jesus Christ. Paul knew full well that Christ was a greater King than Nero. He said, that Christ was the blessed and only potentate . . . the King of kings. He wanted to see that kingdom acknowledged from the pillars of Helipolis on the east to the pillars of Hercules on the west; from Ethiopia on the south to the far islands of the north. He knew that one day that kingdom would stand superior to that of the Caesars, yes and of all the nations of the world.

Paul saw with the eye of faith every knee bowing to Christ the King and every tongue confessing that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11). Though he did not yet see all things put under him, he saw Jesus crowned with glory and honor: **“Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man”** (Hebrews 2:8, 9).

THE HEARER'S DIVIDED

The Gospel divides the hearers. **“And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not”** (Acts 28:24). The division continues through the centuries to the present time. Though many more believe today, yet it is the same old story wherever the Gospel is preached, some believe and some believe not. There are Christ's disciples on the one hand and the world on the other. One who described the conditions of that day said that the great majority of the citizens of Rome had but two cries, the one was, “Bread,” and the other, “The Circus.” But is not the cry of the majority of the people today in our cities almost the same? Their main thought seems to be, either how to get enough to eat, or how to find amusement. Across the sea, conditions, in this regard, are very similar. The race tracks have been crowded and gambling is on the increase. We are as surely called upon to make a decision as they, and the decision which we have to make is just as important today. The call comes to the people of every land, Choose you this day whom you will serve! Will you accept Christ as your Saviour, or will you refuse to believe on Him? To believe not is to reject Him as certainly as it was for the Jews of Rome.

Is it possible that, after nineteen centuries of cumulative evidence, you still doubt and wish to reject Him? You cannot stand in a neutral zone; you must be with Christ or against Him. The choice which you make concerning Christ is a choice which goes on forever. It is a choice between a darkness and light, a choice between joy and sorrow, a choice between Heaven and hell.

“Still as of old,
Man by himself is priced.
For thirty pieces Judas sold
Himself, not Christ.”

CONTINUED REJECTION MEANS DOOM

Continued rejection of Christ meets with certain doom. Paul told the Jews that their rejection of Christ had been foretold by Isaiah. They would hear and not understand; they would see and not perceive. They had closed their ears and hearts to the message. It is worthy of note that this prophecy was quoted by Jesus in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew in connection with His parables of the kingdom. Jesus was foretelling the fact that the kingdom would be taken from Israel. The prophecy was quoted again by John in the twelfth chapter when he was showing how Jesus had done many miracles and had warned the Jews that if they did not receive Him darkness would come upon them. It is quoted here for the last time, so far as we know of its quotation by the apostles, when Paul quoted it to the Jews at Rome.

The first generation of Hebrew people who were with Christ had rejected Him and put Him to death. Now another generation has passed and the Gospel has been taken to the Jews in most of the great centers. Though Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles he had usually gone first to the Jews. A few of them had accepted Christ but the great majority of them had rejected Him. Now in the great central city of the world they were given a last chance. The apostle exhausted all of his energy and resources in trying to convince them, but they would not hear. That was a sad day for the Jewish nation. The church was growing. The mighty works of God were adding proof to the Deity of Christ and the genuineness of the Gospel. Jerusalem had not long to stand after that. The people had sinned away their day of grace and most terrible was the result. The Jews rejected their best friend when they rejected Christ, and they rejected their next best friend when they rejected Paul. They were like the negroes on the Spanish slave ship, who when the Portuguese captain pointed to an English ship which had been in hot pursuit for several hours, and cried, “For your lives! Fight for your lives!” and gave them each a weapon, the deluded and terrified negroes did as they were told, and in doing so killed and wounded their best friends who had come to deliver them. Jesus had come to set the Jews free from their sins, and when they turned against Him and rejected Him, they turned against a friend who had died for them.

The rejection of Christ means eternal doom for Jew or Gentile. Jesus pointed out the fact of eternal separation at the last day. He told how the righteous would be gathered upon the right hand and the wicked upon the left. Those on the left hand would be cast into everlasting punishment where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

What a fearful end for the unbeliever! May their lot not be ours! May we believe on Christ and may we trust Him for time and eternity!

THE WORD OF GOD NOT BOUND

The Gospel of Christ cannot be bound. Some have said, with a voice of lamentation, that the last picture in the book of Acts is one of division. Ah! my friend, you are mistaken! That is not the last picture in the book. The last picture in the book is that of Paul “**preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him**” (Acts 28:31). The last phrase is one word in the Greek. It means “*UNHINDERED.*”

Those who have thought the book is incomplete, as Sir William Ramsay has done, have missed the last picture and its import. True, the book is not closed as a modern novelist would have closed it. We are interested in Paul. We want to hear all about the trial. We want to learn what the emperor did with him, but the Spirit left a more important lesson with us. He has spared us the sad sight of seeing Paul led out to the block. He has assured us that Paul's faith remained firm and that he was ready to be offered.

He has closed the book with the thought of Christ's kingdom and of Christ's Gospel of salvation standing out pre-eminently above all else in the queen city of the world, being proclaimed there and even the place of the Caesars, UNHINDERED!

The Book of Acts opens with the thought that Christ is continuing to do and preach by His Spirit, through His disciples, until the message shall be proclaimed in Jerusalem and Judaea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the world. It closes after recording that this has been done to a remarkable degree in the first generation after Christ, and that the Gospel was then being proclaimed in the center of the metropolis of the world unhindered.

During the infancy of the first generation of the Christian era the wicked king tried to kill the one who had been proclaimed as the coming King. At the close of the second generation that kingdom had spread over the world and was being proclaimed with all boldness under the guardianship of the Imperial Army, yes even in the palace of the Emperor, with all boldness, unhindered.

When the Gospel seemed most hindered, because Paul was in chains, it was less hindered. Paul was in one sense more limited, in another sense less limited than during any two years of his active life. He was standing at the hub of the world preaching the Gospel to men who would take it to the utmost extremes of the world.

Paul had loyal messengers at his command who were carrying his letters out to the churches at Colossae, Philippi, Ephesus, to Philemon and perhaps to others. Thus he was strengthening the churches which were already established, and writing messages which were to bless and strengthen the church in all time. How wonderfully the plans of God work out to the furtherance of the Gospel.

God has taught us that the progress of the Gospel does not depend upon the freedom, or even upon the life, of the most zealous messenger. It did not depend upon Paul, it did not depend upon Peter. Peter is said to have died during this same persecution at Rome. The Gospel lives on and continues to spread over the earth regardless of those who may fall.

Did you ever read how the last fight in the Coliseum ended? This is the way it is said to have occurred. Rome had become largely Christian but still the cruel sports of the people had not been entirely given up. After a famous victory, the emperor, a feeble boy, and all the great men of Rome, went to the crowded theatre to witness the amusements given in honor of the triumph. After the harmless sports were over some gladiators entered the arena armed with sharp swords. The people shouted with delight because the old savage amusements of their heathen days were restored to them. Suddenly an old man, dressed in the garb of a hermit and unknown to the people, sprang into the arena and declared that as Christian people they must not suffer men to slay each other thus. An angry cry arose from the eager crowd. The gladiators, disappointed of their gain, menaced the hermit fiercely, crying, "back old man, for thy life!" But the stranger stood fearless before the angry mob, he heeded not the swords of the gladiators, nor the yells of the people, but solemnly protested against the deed of blood. In another moment he lay dead upon the red sand, pierced by a dozen wounds. He died, but his words lived. When the people saw the fearless courage of a weak old man, shame filled their hearts; the sports were stopped, and never again did the gladiators fight in the Coliseum. Men may die; heroes of the faith may pass away, but the Word of God lives and dominates the hearts of men.

SILENCE THE MESSENGER BUT NOT THE MESSAGE

In the last letter which Paul wrote, when he was ready to be offered, and when the time of his departure was near at hand, he assured us that though he was bound, "**Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound**" (II Timothy 2:9). Can you bind the Word of God by arresting the messenger?

Proud and rebellious Pharaoh tried it; he thought that when he had ordered Moses out from his presence and had told him that he was to see his face no more that he was rid of his message. Rejection of the message neither bound the messenger nor silenced the message; but it ended in the ignominious death of the haughty king who rejected it.

Ahab tried to bind the messenger and eradicate the message. By the time the dogs were licking the blood of Ahab in the pool of Samaria he had learned the lesson that God's Word is not bound; but then he was where he would have given his ivory palace, the vineyard of Naboth, and all else besides for a drop of water to cool his tongue as he suffers the torments of the lost.

Nebuchadnezzar tried to silence the messenger of God, but after he had been driven from men and had suffered the horrors of a demented condition for seven years, he was ready to admit that no one could limit God; that He doeth according to His will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth and no one can say to him, what doest Thou? or why doest Thou thus?

The Jewish mob tried to silence the messenger of the Gospel; but the mob, cruel and determined as it was, found that the messenger of God was wrested from its grasp and the message went on with the added impetus and under military protection to the heart of the empire.

Several of the Roman emperors after Nero tried to destroy the Gospel, and one of them, who had persecuted the Christians with most terrible severity, thought that he had succeeded so well in stamping out Christianity, that he caused a coin to be struck declaring that Christianity was extinct. Nevertheless, the Gospel was not extinct, nor was it bound, but continued to spread.

In spite of the enemies at Damascus;
in spite of the blood-thirsty mob at Lystra;
in spite of the prison at Philippi;
in spite of the silversmith's guild at Ephesus;
in spite of the oath bound cut-throats at Jerusalem;
in spite of the typhoon on the great sea;
in spite of the chains at Rome,
The Word of God was not, and could not be bound.

It is said that one of the Roman emperors, who had done all he could to exterminate Christianity, was at last wounded in battle by a dart which pierced his side. The blood was flowing rapidly from his wound and he saw that his time was short. Grasping a handful of the crimson blood he flung it toward the sky exclaiming, "Oh Man of Galilee, Thou hast conquered! Thou has conquered!"

DO YOU BELIEVE?

At the close of this chapter, and of this book there are two important questions which confront us. The first of them is, are you among those who believe or those who believe not? What is your answer? Will you attempt to put it off? It is a dangerous thing to neglect to answer. "**How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?**" (Hebrews 2:3). If you put off the answer for today it may be that you are putting it off for eternity. Dr. Banks relates the incident of an old minister, quite eccentric and accustomed to impress spiritual lessons in unique and unexpected ways, who one day entered the shop of a member of his church without knocking or ringing the bell, and inquired, before he made any salutation, "Did you expect me?" "No!" was the astonished reply. "What if I had been death?" he solemnly asked, then stepped out as abruptly as he came, and was gone before his parishioner could make answer. It made a tremendous impression upon the man, and brought to his mind with a new emphasis such as he had never realized before, the Saviour's words: "**Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh**" (Matthew 24:44).

DO YOU WITNESS?

The second question is: Are you a help or a hindrance to the progress of the Gospel? With you is the Gospel bound, or are you making it known to all within your reach?

Spurgeon once said: "I have heard that in the desert, when the caravans are in want of water, they are accustomed to send on a camel, with its rider, some distance in advance; then after a little space another. As soon as the first finds water, almost before he stoops down to drink, he shouts aloud, 'Come!' The next one hearing the voice repeats the word, 'Come!' The nearest again takes up the cry, 'Come!' until the whole wilderness echoes with the word, 'Come!'" "Are we raising our voices with that cry which should re-echo throughout all the world? **"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!"** (Matthew 11:28). Or with that other word: **"If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink"** (John 7:37). **"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"** (Acts 4:12).

To believe on Christ, and to witness for Him: these are the primary and never ceasing demands of Christ. if we have failed in either of these we are in a sad state.

QUESTIONS **(Acts 28:17-31)**

1. About how many years of service as a missionary had Paul seen at this time?
2. In what position was he held?
3. Why was he held as a prisoner?
4. What degree of freedom was he allowed?
5. What was the nature of the Roman emperor?
6. Did the study of art change his nature?
7. How long was Paul in Rome until he began to testify for Christ?
8. To whom did he preach first?
9. Were there any Jews who believed?
10. When the Jews in general would not hear to whom did he turn?
11. What authority did he quote for so doing?
12. For what reason did Paul say he was bound with a chain?
13. What was Paul's state of mind during his imprisonment (Philippian 1:15-18).
14. Why are we not told more of Paul's trial?
15. What did Paul teach us by example and word about utilizing our time?
16. What did Paul preach about while in Rome?
17. Was it possible for men to hinder him while at Rome?
18. How did his influence and opportunity to preach compare with his preaching while at liberty? Could the Jews drive him out of Rome?
19. How did Paul's position and preaching effect others (Philippians 1:13, 14)?
20. Can the Gospel of Christ be bound? (Acts 28:21; II Timothy 2:9)?

~ end of chapter 44 ~

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