



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 28:1-16

Acts

"Rome At Last"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our text this morning is Acts 28. We are one lesson away from the end. I've enjoyed very much the book of Acts and the things which we learn in it, the greatness of our God and His guidance of us. We see that this morning but we saw it last week, and if you'll remember, we studied the entire 27th chapter, which is a very long passage. It's a passage which deals with Paul's journey to Rome from Caesarea where Paul would stand trial before Caesar.

The chapter is about the voyage from Caesarea and much of it deals with the storm at sea, and you'll remember it came and the ship was blown about the Mediterranean, the sailors were helpless, they did everything they could to guide the ship and get out of the storm but they couldn't. Eventually, after two weeks, they gave up hope of being saved, and that's when Paul came forward and he gave to them encouragement and wise counsel. He told them not to worry, not to give up hope, that no one board would be lost. He told them that they were to stay on the ship and that God would deliver them, and He did.

God delivered them but He used the apostle as His agent in saving that ship, and Paul ministered greatly to those people. The ship foundered on a reef, it broke apart, the sailors and the passengers swam or held onto planks of wood and made it to the shore, and that brings us to chapter 28 verse 1, and we'll read down through verse 16.

When they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta. The natives showed us extraordinary

kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all. But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." However, he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm.

But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god. Now, in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us courteously three days. And it happened that the father of Publius was lying in bed afflicted with recurrent fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and after he prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him. After this had happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and getting cured.

They also honored us with many marks of respect; and when we were setting sail, they supplied us with all we needed. At the end of three months we set sail on an Alexandrian ship which had wintered at the island, and which had the twin brothers for its figurehead. After we put in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. From there we sailed around and arrived at Rhegium, and a day later a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. There we found some brethren and were invited to stay with them for seven days; and thus we came to Rome.

And the brethren, when they heard about us, came from there as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns to meet us; and when Paul saw them, he gave thanks to God and took courage. When we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him.

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for the time that we have together this morning, the opportunity that we have to gather together and to open the Scriptures and read them publicly. That's a great privilege to simply possess your inerrant Word. But we also have the privilege of then considering the meaning of this text that we have read, and we pray that you'd bless us as we do that. We pray that you would clear our minds of the concerns of the week, of the things that lay ahead that we may be thinking about or circumstances that we may find ourselves in, and free our minds to be fixed upon this text and the things that we can learn from it. Guide us in our thinking.

We are a privileged people beyond our ability to comprehend. Every believer in Jesus Christ possesses the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit who is our teacher, who is our guide, and we pray for His ministry this morning, that it would go unhindered. That He would guide us in an understanding of this text and make the right applications to us. What a marvelous text it is, Father. It reminds us of your guidance, your sovereign hand that is upon us. We saw that last week in Acts 27; we see it again this week. We see it throughout the Word of God.

The fact that you are absolutely sovereign, that you are completely involved in our lives, that you are guiding us through the events of life, should give us great encouragement, and I pray that that will be the encouragement that we receive. So instruct us. There are other things as well, Father, that we learn from this text but certainly we learn that you are in control and you bring us safely to our destination, just as you did the apostle and those with him. "And so we came to Rome," Luke writes, and that's a great message in and of itself.

So bless us, Father, as we study and bless us not only spiritually but also materially. We pray for those who have physical needs. We pray for the sick, pray that you'd encourage them and give healing. We pray for those who face surgeries in the days to come. We pray

that you'd give success to those operations. Bless the doctors who attend to those individuals. Bless us all, Father, with the material things of life to the degree that we need them. Make us grateful for what you give. You give exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think and we thank you for that.

And bless us in the privations of life. When you take things away, help us to understand that that's for our good and to rejoice in that as well. You've given us much, Father, and most importantly you've given your Son. We thank you for Him. We pray that as we gather again this evening to remember Him, that you'd bless our meeting, bless those who participate. Bless all of us that we would be built up in the faith and bless us now as we sing our final hymn. Prepare our hearts for our time of study together. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] In ancient Rome in the Forum, there was a golden milestone from which all roads in the city went out in all directions to all parts of the empire, and so the saying was true that all roads lead to Rome. It was like a magnet to the people. For a citizen of the empire, Rome was the center of the world. A city of magnificent buildings, temples and tombs, the palaces of the Caesars, places of entertainment, theaters and baths, the Circus Maximus. Rome was the center of commerce and political life, the seat of worldly power, and people came from all over the world to see its glory.

For years it had been Paul's desire to visit the city. Back in Acts 19, he was aware of God's call for him to go there. "I must also see Rome," he said. Not as a tourist but as an apostle. In Romans 1:15, he wrote that he was eager to preach the gospel there. That fit Paul's pattern of ministry. It was his practice to preach in major cities from which the gospel could disseminate to the outlying regions, and Rome was a crucial city. All of the roads led out of that city throughout the empire, and so if the gospel were to spread worldwide, then it must go to that great city. That was Paul's strategy; it was God's Will.

And so in his final years, all of Paul's roads led to Rome, even when his paths passed through the sea because God guided him there and God guided him safely and certainly. Acts 28 is the record of his arrival there where Luke writes in verse 14 in a kind of climactic statement, "And so we came to Rome." From Jerusalem and Caesarea, from riot, imprisonment, and plots, through storm and shipwreck, over land and sea, they had finally reached Rome, just as the Lord had promised.

God's Will cannot be thwarted, not by jails, not by storms or shipwrecks. It was God's Will that Paul stand before Caesar and it was God's Will that he witnessed to Caesar's household. But before Rome lay Malta. That was the island where the ship had crashed and its crew and passengers had washed ashore. So before beginning his ministry in Rome, Paul had a mission in Malta. That was the divine purpose of the storm, to carry Paul across the sea to that tiny island where souls would be saved.

It was late November when they arrived. The weather was rainy and cold. Everyone was tired and soaked from the sea, but they got a very kind reception from the natives who found them. In verse 2, Luke calls them *hoi barbaroi*, the barbarians. The King James version follows that with the translation "the barbarous people" while the New American Standard Bible translates it "the natives," and it translates it that way because they were not barbarians in the sense that we know that word. They weren't people who were savages. They weren't crude in their behavior.

The Greeks thought that everyone who didn't speak Greek was a barbarian. Other languages other than Greek were to their ears very harsh. They were like the sound of "bar-bar-bar" and so they coined the expression "barbarians." The people of Malta were largely Phoenicians. They didn't speak Greek, they spoke Punic, which was the language of Carthage on the coast of North Africa, but if their language was barbarian, their behavior was very civilized. They took

in the 276 survivors with warm hospitality, literally warm hospitality. It was a rainy, cold morning when they found these men.

Paul and the others were wet and shivering, and the natives of the island built a fire for them, and Luke writes "received us all." And Paul got involved. Rather than sit by the fire and be warmed, he helped gather wood. So he was as helpful and as practical on the land as he had been helpful and practical on the ship at sea. But in gathering sticks for the fire, he unwittingly picked up a poisonous snake that was sleeping among the branches. It probably looked like a twig lying stiff in the cold, and when he laid the bundle on the fire, the heat quickly revived it.

T. E. Lawrence, whom we know better as Lawrence of Arabia, described a similar incident in his book, *Revolt in the Desert*, about his desert campaign during World War I. The desert, as you know, can become very cold at night, and the Arabs had made a fire. He wrote that as it grew hot, a long black snake wound slowly out into the group. He assumed that it had been gathered with the twigs. It moved away harmlessly but the viper that Paul picked up didn't. It bit his hand and Luke writes that it fastened on his hand. It suggests that it hung there for a moment until he shook it off into the fire.

Well, the natives standing there saw this snake hanging from his hand and they concluded that Paul was a murderer who was now receiving his just reward. They said, "Though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." That word "justice" is literally *diké*, which was also the name of the Greek goddess for justice, and so they were thinking that she had gotten revenge, that the Furies had caught up with Paul and they had brought justice to him. Now, that's a very common way to think, not necessarily the mythology of it, but it's common for people today to think in much that way.

Even Christians think that way. They often assume that when bad things happen that it is because of something bad that a person has done. The reality is that bad things often happen for no apparent reason, which means we can't judge a person's spiritual condition by his or her

circumstances. Godly people get sick. They have chronic illness. They may suffer loss, they may suffer poverty or experience injustice while the ungodly prosper. That was the struggle that Asaph had, you know. He records that in Psalm 73. He writes about the wicked flourishing, "there are no pains in their deaths and their body is fat."

Job, on the other hand, suffered great loss. He argued his innocence throughout the book while his friends tried to convince him that he must be guilty of something. "God wouldn't afflict his friends," they thought. But as the book of Job proves, God does afflict those He loves. So circumstances are not a measure of a person's spiritual condition. God brings difficulty into our lives for various reasons. Sometimes it is to correct. Sometimes it is because there is a sin in the life of the individual and so God disciplines us, and it is proper to ask ourselves if God is doing that, if He's teaching us something when hardship becomes our experience.

Paul taught that in 1 Corinthians 11. The Corinthians experienced some severe discipline for their carelessness and their undisciplined lives, the sin that was among them. The author of Hebrews teaches it in Hebrews 12, that God disciplines His people like a father disciplines his son. But we also need to know that not all hardship is due to a particular sin in one's life. It's not all discipline to correct a person because of a particular failure. It is just part of human experience.

One of Job's friends got it right. They didn't get everything right. Most of what they said wasn't right, but they did get some things right, and Eliphaz said, "Man is born for trouble as sparks fly upward." That's certainly true, we are, but God uses everything. And sometimes trouble, hardship, teaches us patience and builds character.

Sometimes it's for God's glory. Jesus made that point in John chapter 9 with the blind man. Remember, he was sitting there and the disciples walked by and they asked Jesus who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind, and Jesus answered neither, but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him. He healed the man, which glorified Himself and gave that man, that now healed blind

man, a great opportunity to witness and he did. He had a great testimony to the men of the city. It was so also in Paul's case. He was an innocent man but hardship happened to him and it happened in order to bring glory to God and open up opportunities of ministry for Paul to the natives of Malta.

They watched as Paul kept his composure. He didn't panic. He shook off the snake into the fire while the people waited to see what would happen. They expected him to swell up or drop dead, but Luke writes that when nothing happened, they changed their minds about Paul. He wasn't a murderer after all, he was a god. So they went from one extreme to another. I'm sure that Luke saw a little bit of humor in this, in the way their minds switched from one extreme to the other, and what it shows us is how unreliable circumstances are as a touchstone for truth, as an indication of spiritual reality. They are undependable as a guide. One moment Paul's a murderer; the next moment he's a god.

But these were pagan people. They thought like that and sometimes, as I said, we too think like that. But they were in the dark. They didn't have the light of God's Word, but this event opened the door for them to receive it. Just as Paul's calm and Paul's wisdom in the storm at sea gave him an audience with the ship's crew and the ship's passengers, so too the miracle with the snake gave him an audience with the people of Malta. We see that in the verses that follow. In verse 7, it gave him an opportunity to minister to the leading man on the island, a man named Publius. In the providence of God, the shipwreck happened at the most significant place in the island.

And I say the providence of God because you see that as you trace out that storm in chapter 27. It begins in an eastern part of the sea and that ship for two weeks is blown over the Mediterranean, and there were all kinds of places it could have gone. It would have been a very reasonable thing to understand that ship crashing on the northern shore of Africa and yet what happened was it blew south and then north and it landed on this very tiny island of Malta. And not only on this very tiny

island of Malta but at the right place on that island, the most significant place on the island, where the governor, Publius, lived.

He was a Roman and Luke writes in verse 7 that he welcomed them and entertained them generously for three days. So in the providence of God, they come to that place where the governor of the island lives, a Roman man, and he took these survivors in. He entertained them for some time on his estate so that he could sort out their situation and find them lodging for the winter there on the island. Well, he had a father who was very sick. We read of that in verse 8. Luke says that he had fever and dysentery.

It's not certain what that sickness was but one of the commentators, Richard Longnecker, tentatively identified it as Malta fever, which was common on the island and other parts of the Mediterranean. In the last century, and 1887 is the date that has been given, its cause was traced to a microorganism found in the milk of goats which caused fever and these effects that would last for weeks and become a chronic kind of illness that could go on for years. It was common on the island and some feel that this is very likely what his father, Publius's father, suffered.

So Paul was asked to come and visit him, no doubt because of the miracle that had taken place with the viper. This commended Paul to the people of the island and they recommended him to the governor. He came and after praying, we read that he went in and laid hands on him and healed him. Calvin makes the point that this was God's way of rewarding Publius's hospitality and making it plain that kindness shown to the needy is pleasing to him, and so God blessed Publius for his care of these needy men and more than repaid his kindness through this miracle of healing.

Now, that may be and that may be one of the reasons, but the primary reason I think is that this was the means of advancing the gospel in this area where it had never been heard. This is the pattern that we see throughout the gospels and the book of Acts, the doing of miracles to promote the gospel. It's what Paul called in 2 Corinthians 12:12 signs of

a true apostle, signs and wonders and miracles. Miracles pointed to the truth. Miracles were like signs, and they were done in order to authenticate Paul's ministry, to authenticate the truth of the gospel, and establish the church wherever these men went, and that happened here.

Paul healed the father of Publius and word got out. No doubt it got out about the miracle of the viper, the snake that bit him but did not injure him and his ability to heal this man, and so as a result, people from all over the island sought his help. We read in verse 9: "After this had happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and getting cured." It may be, as some have suggested, that Luke also added his medical skill to Paul's miracle since the word that's used here, "cured," which is different from the word "healed," was a word that was used of medical treatment, and so perhaps Luke lent some assistance to Paul, but still, this was mainly and probably completely Paul's service of healing miraculously.

So here is Paul, he is a prisoner still, shipwrecked on Malta yet ministering with power and ministering with urgency, showing that a servant of Christ is never off duty for the Lord. Paul was busy whether he was on the ship during the storm, whether he was on the island with these natives, he was working and serving the Lord Jesus Christ. And the people there appreciated it greatly. Luke writes in verse 10 that "they honored us with many marks of respect" and they supplied all of their needs for the voyage when they departed. They left the island after three months, which was probably around February when it was safe to travel the sea.

So after a detour in Malta, they were back on track to Rome, though in reality they were never really off track. A visit to Malta was never part of Paul's plan, never a part of his missionary strategy. Rome was always his goal, but Malta was always part of God's plan, and He blew the ship off course to bring Paul there. That's the mystery of God's leading. We as children of God have the Spirit of God and we have new minds. We have the minds of Christ and we are to use our minds wisely.

We are to plan out our lives. We are to chart them as best we can and prepare for the future, but the fact is we can't plan for everything.

God has His guidance, His leading, His way of taking us to places that we're not prepared to go, that we weren't expecting. There are detours that we haven't planned. But all are part of God's plan. They are all at God's direction, and that's the case with Paul here. God had as great a concern for tiny Malta as he did for majestic Rome, but Rome was the ultimate destination and nothing could prevent Paul from arriving there.

So the journey resumed and in verses 11 through 16, Luke traces it out in four stages. It reads very much like a travelogue. They first sailed to Syracuse, the capital of Sicily. They stay there for three days, then they travel to Rhegium on the tip of the toe of the boot of Italy. From there they made their way along the Italian coast until they came to Puteoli, which is in the gulf of Naples. The last leg of the trip was over land to Rome.

The ship that carried them to Italy was another Alexandrian grain ship like the one they had traveled on through the storm, and Luke makes a point of stating that this one had the twin brothers for its figurehead. The twins are Castor and Pollux. In mythology, they were the sons of Zeus. They are also the twins of the constellation Gemini. They were the gods of navigation, and sailors painted them on the prows of their ships and sacrificed to them for good fortune and favorable winds, and Luke must have seen some irony in this after the events of chapter 27. Maybe that is the reason that he makes a special note of that, mentioning the ship's figurehead.

The sailors, like most of the people of the ancient world, lived by the stars. They trusted the stars, the gods, to get them safely across the sea. But during the storm of chapter 27, Castor and Pollux were nowhere to be seen. Luke wrote that for many days, no stars appeared in the sky to navigate by night. It wasn't the Roman gods, wasn't the stars that brought the ship to Malta without loss of life, it was the Lord Jesus Christ, and he would bring Paul safely to Rome as

well. He is the true God of navigation, the Creator of the stars and the wind and the waves, and the only one that people should look to and trust in to guide them over land and sea and through life. He is a faithful guide; He is one to be trusted.

Luke and Paul and Aristarchus did, they trusted Him, of course, but maybe also the centurion, Julius, and others of the soldiers and sailors did as well. Maybe after a miraculous deliverance from a near-fatal storm and shipwreck, after witnessing the wonders that the apostle Paul did there on the isle of Malta, maybe they came to learn who the one true God really is. Perhaps. Julius certainly gained a lot of confidence in Paul through all of this. When they arrived at Puteoli, the third stop, they remained there for a week. Luke writes in verse 14 that they found some Christians there who invited them to stay with them for seven days. It was an unusual arrangement for a prisoner, but Julius allowed it.

Paul had found favor greatly with Julius, and God's hand was in it. It was His way of strengthening Paul for his arrival in Rome, and it was also a fulfillment of a promise that the Lord made to His disciples. In Luke 18, He promised His disciples that very kind of encouragement that we see here. No one, He said, has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God who will not have much more, and in the end, in the age to come, eternal life.

Coming to Christ means leaving one life and entering another. It means sacrifice, but what we receive in return is infinitely better, infinitely greater than what we leave behind. We lose nothing that can compare with what we gain. We lose perhaps our family, we may lose a set of friends, but we gain another family, we gain a better and larger family, an eternal family, and friends all over the world. That was certainly Paul's experience. When he was converted at Damascus, he left his old life behind. He told the Galatians, "The world has been crucified to me and I to the world." That's really an amazing statement when you think about it.

Paul is saying, "The world has been crucified to me. Since I've been brought to Christ, the world has no attraction for me anymore. It is dead to me, I'm not drawn to it, it doesn't have an allure for me. The principles, the ambitions of the world don't tug on my heart. The world has been crucified to me, and I in turn have been crucified to the world. It doesn't look on me in any good way at all. Doesn't see anything in me that's advantageous or admirable. I've been crucified to the world." That's the life of the apostle Paul. He was brought to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and in being brought to Jesus Christ, he was brought to a new life. The old life was gone.

He lost many friends. He may even have been cut off from his natural family, and that must have grieved him greatly. The career and prestige that he had enjoyed in Judaism was over forever. But by losing everything, he gained everything. He gained a new life, he gained a new mission, an eternal mission, and he gained new friends, first in Damascus and then in Jerusalem and all over the world. Wherever he went, Paul met Christian brothers and sisters. He met them there in Italy, and he continued to meet them as he approached Rome, the fourth and last leg of the trip.

They, Paul and his companions, would have traveled on the famous Appian Way, which has been called the oldest, straightest, and most perfectly made of all Roman roads. News of Paul's arrival spread quickly, and many left Rome and headed down the highway to greet him. Some made it as far as the Market of Appius, which was about 40 miles from Rome. Others didn't make it that far. They made it to the Three Inns or Three Taverns, which was about 30 miles from the city. The reception they gave Paul was a big boost.

Three years earlier when Paul wrote the book of Romans, he expressed his desire and his intention to visit them, but he had never seen these Romans face-to-face. He had probably wondered what kind of reception he would receive when he arrived there, and I'm sure he wondered that particularly now that he was arriving there as a prisoner, a man in chains. But if he had any concerns about that, they

vanished with the great outpouring of interest in him and this show of hospitality.

Paul knew that he was going to stand before Caesar in Rome, that's why he was coming to the city, but he didn't know what the outcome of that trial would be. He didn't know whether he would be released as a free man or be made a martyr. The support that these Christians in Rome gave him was an encouragement to the apostle as he faced a great trial, and Luke makes special mention of Paul's gratitude to God for the reception he received.

It was a further evidence that God's hand was on him. That in spite of the circumstances, which were adverse, which were not comfortable, which were very difficult, shameful in the sense that he is considered a prisoner, he's bound in chains. Nevertheless, all of this was confirmation that he was where God wanted him to be. Hard as it was, he was where God wanted him to be, which is a confidence that every Christian can have as we walk by faith as Paul did. God guides His people. He provides for us along the way wherever we go. We can trust Him to do that. He is our security as He demonstrated throughout Paul's life.

We see that from beginning to end, we see it again in this situation on this occasion. And in this, He also shows us our responsibility to be hospitable to one another. This not only shows us God's wisdom and guidance but it reminds us of how we're to respond to one another, that we are to make an effort to care for other Christians and be an encouragement to them. Paul was greatly encouraged by the hospitality and the greeting of these Italian Christians, and they give us an example to follow. They give us a model. We're to be like that. We're to be hospitable, we're to be encouraging, we're to seek to bear one another's burdens as these people did.

Well, this was how the journey finally ended. "And so we came to Rome," Luke writes in verse 14. Those are triumphant words. It had been a long and turbulent journey over many miles and through

many dangers, but they had reached their destination just as the Lord had promised, "and so we came to Rome." Paul hadn't foreseen arriving in Rome under these circumstances, as a prisoner, but God had a special purpose in that, and we have an indication of it in verse 16. "When we entered Rome," Luke writes, "Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him."

The convenience of staying in private quarters in a rented house rather than in a Roman jail would allow Paul to meet with friends and have interviews with those who were interested in Christianity. It was a comfort that in part was due to Paul's Roman citizenship but also a kindness shown to him by Julius, the centurion, because of his interest in Paul. And we saw that from the very beginning of this voyage in chapter 27. He had given Paul various liberties. He trusted Paul. He was attracted to Paul. Not because of Paul's physical appearance. Paul himself writes in 2 Corinthians 10:10 that his appearance was unimpressive to people.

An ancient description that was given to him in an apocryphal book, one that we saw a couple of weeks ago, supports that. Paul is described as short and bald with a hook nose and crooked legs. He was not an impressive individual. But he's also described as a man who was full of grace and sometimes he had the face of an angel. Now, I don't know if the physical description is correct. It's not Scripture, it's extra-biblical, but I am sure that this description of Paul as a person is quite accurate. He was full of grace. On the ship, he had shown that. He had shown a great concern for these people.

Very few of them, if any, other than the two men that were with Paul, Luke and Aristarchus, were believers. These were pagan people and yet Paul showed great concern for them. He gave them encouragement, he gave them words of truth, he gave them words of wisdom, he served the ship well and then on land he did the same, he helped, he gathered sticks to build a fire and he ministered to the people on that island. He ministered sacrificially. He lived as Christ lived, speaking the truth and being a servant. And Julius from the

very beginning saw that in Paul. He saw something very special in the apostle Paul.

Paul was what we might call a winsome individual, a pleasant individual. He was not a harsh, hard kind of man as he is sometimes portrayed as being, a man of rigid logic but no compassion. He was a man of great compassion, a man who must have exuded joy and happiness in the worst of circumstances, and that was attractive to this centurion, Julius.

God leads us and He opens doors for us to be witnesses in a variety of ways. We see that here. He's sovereign over nature. He makes the winds and the waves do His bidding. He's also, though, sovereign over human hearts and He makes men agreeable toward His saints. He makes them helpful toward His people. He turns their heart in that direction, but He uses various means to do that. We considered that last week, the various means that God uses. He has elected a people for Himself and yet He brings them to Himself through the preaching of the gospel, that's the means. Evangelism is the way by which people are brought into the family of God.

We desire to have wisdom and we must have wisdom, but wisdom doesn't simply appear within our minds. A knowledge of God and His way for us doesn't simply materialize within our minds. We must study, we must apply ourselves to the means that God gives us of the Word of God and be students, and so it goes. Prayer is a means of obtaining God's blessing. Well, one of the ways in which God opens men's hearts to be receptive to us and to show us favor is by our good character. How we behave is important. Paul was an obedient man. He was faithful to the Lord and he was a man that exhibited the fruit of the Spirit.

Now, the fruit of the Spirit is a product of the Spirit of God. It's supernatural and yet we are to be individuals who seek to exhibit it and we must make every effort to love and to have joy and to have peace and to exhibit these things. The fruit of the Spirit is God's work within us, but we are to be active in seeking to display it. Paul did

and Julius was attracted to that. He was attracted to Paul, and so he gave Paul more freedom. He was allowed to stay in some private quarters, and as I say, God had a special purpose in that.

Paul was chained to a Roman soldier, one of the Praetorian Guard. It was probably a new soldier every day or every night but always he was with a soldier, chained to his wrist. But the chain was no hindrance to Paul's ministry. It was in fact a means of spreading the gospel. In fact, it is probably more correct to say that the guards were chained to Paul than Paul was chained to them. They got to know him. They got to know him very well. No doubt he told them all about his life and about that great event on the Damascus road when Jesus Christ appeared to him and changed him completely, and he told them about his Lord and Savior, he told them about salvation and Christ.

He told them the great themes of the book of Romans that he had written some years before, of justification by faith alone. He spoke to these men every day. They got to know Paul very well, and as a result of that, the gospel spread among the soldiers and it spread into the palace itself. Paul would later write to the Philippians and he would write about these things, and in chapter 1 and in chapter 4, he describes his circumstances in prison and he writes in chapter 1 verse 13: "My imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole Praetorian Guard and to everyone else."

He doesn't tell us who the "everyone else" is, but then later on in chapter 4, he explains that through – at least we would assume through the emperor's guard, the gospel entered the palace itself because in chapter 4 verse 22, he gave the Philippians greetings from those of Caesar's household. When Luke wrote, "And so we came to Rome," he knew that Paul came into that city triumphantly, in spite of his chains.

God leads his people well. Nothing can frustrate His Will, not even Satan himself, and from the beginning of Paul's ministry to the very end of it, he dealt with the devil and with all of the hindrances

that he put before the apostle. On the island of Cyprus, on his first missionary journey, Elymas the magician opposed Paul and Paul struck him blind. In the second missionary journey in the city of Philippi, the slave girl possessed by the demon Python was a hindrance and Paul cast it out. And on Malta, the snake bite was an attack by the devil but its poison was harmless to the apostle. It could not keep him from arriving in Rome.

And I think that there is in that event on Malta some symbolism. At the end of the book of Romans, Paul wrote, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet," and you get the image of a serpent being crushed under the feet. Satan, that old serpent, the devil, is powerless against God's people, and powerless against us because Christ defeated him on the cross. The sting of death has been removed, and what that means for us is that we can serve Christ without fear. We can go where He leads us without concern. The Lord leads us well. He leads us wisely, He leads us safely, and so we can trust Him.

We can live obedient lives in spite of the circumstances and know that He will guide us. Maybe He'll take us to some detours like Malta, but wherever He takes us, it will be according to His wisdom, His guidance. We can trust Him fully. May God help us to do that. If we take one lesson away from this text, may it be that, that He is a reliable guide and we are to trust Him.

Do you have that confidence? Do you have that assurance? Do you have the assurance that the circumstances of your life are under the control of God and that He is guiding you safely through life? You can have that confidence only in Jesus Christ. Only by faith in Him. He is God's Son and our Savior who died for sinners so that all who believe in Him would be saved. So if you're here without Christ, I urge you: trust in Him. Realize that you are a sinner, that you are lost, that you have no basis for confidence in this life. This life can end in a moment, but in Jesus Christ, we are absolutely secure.

So put your faith in Him. The moment you do, you receive the forgiveness of sin and life everlasting. And then keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. He's a reliable guide. May God help all of us to do that. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness and your grace. We come to a text such as this and we are reminded of it. Paul had set before him a destination. Along the way, there were all kinds of hindrances, all kinds of difficulties, and yet the words were true, "And so we came to Rome." You brought him safely to that destination where you had promised to bring him, and we can have that same assurance that you will bring us safely to the place where you would have us to go. We are to trust you, trust your leading. May we do that, Father. Create that faith within us, that trust within us, that we might live lives that are pleasing to you and beneficial to those around us. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.