

# CHAPTER 28

We are the more concerned to take notice of and to improve what is here recorded concerning blessed Paul because, after the story of this chapter, we hear no more of him in the sacred history, though we have a great deal of him yet before us in his epistles. We have attended him through several chapters from one judgment-seat to another, and could at last have taken leave of him with the more pleasure if we had left him at liberty; but in this chapter we are to condole with him, and yet congratulate him.

**I.** We condole with him as a poor shipwrecked passenger, stripped of all; and yet congratulate him,

**1.** As singularly owned by his God in his distress, preserved himself from receiving hurt by a viper that fastened on his hand (v. 1-6), and being made an instrument of much good in the island on which they were cast, in healing many that were sick, and particularly the father of Publius, the chief man of the island (v. 7-9).

**2.** As much respected by the people there (v. 10).

**II.** We condole with him as a poor confined prisoner, carried to Rome under the notion of a criminal removed by “habeas corpus” (v. 11-16), and yet we congratulate him,

**1.** Upon the respect shown him by the Christians at Rome, who came a great way to meet him (v. 15).

**2.** Upon the favour he found with the captain of the guard, into whose custody he was delivered, who suffered him to dwell by himself, and did not put him in the common prison (v. 16).

**3.** Upon the free conference he had with the Jews at Rome, both about his own affair (v. 17-22) and upon the subject of the Christian religion in general (v. 23), the issue of which was that God was glorified, many were edified, the rest left inexcusable, and the apostles justified in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles (v. 24-29).

**4.** Upon the undisturbed liberty he had to preach the gospel to all comers in his own house for two years together (v. 30-31).

## ✠ ACTS 28:1-10

### PAUL'S VOYAGE TOWARDS ROME

What a great variety of places and circumstances do we find Paul in! He was a planet, and not a fixed star. Here we have him in an island to which, in all probability, he had never come if he had not been thrown upon it by a storm; and yet it seems God has work for him to do here. Even stormy winds fulfil God's counsel, and an ill wind indeed it is that blows nobody any good; this ill wind blew good to the island of Melita; for it gave them Paul's company for three months, who was a blessing to every place he came to. This island was called Melita, lying between Sicily and Africa, twenty miles long, and twelve broad; it lies furthest from the continent of any island in the Mediterranean; it is about sixty miles from Sicily. It has been famous since for the knights of Malta, who, when the Turks overran that part of Christendom, made a noble stand, and gave some check to the progress of their arms. Now here we have,

**I.** The kind reception which the inhabitants of this island gave to the distressed strangers that were shipwrecked on their coast (v. 2): *The barbarous people showed us no little kindness.* God had promised that there should be no loss of any man's life; and, *as for God, his work is perfect.* If they had escaped the sea, and when they came ashore had perished for cold or want, it had been all one; therefore Providence continues its care of them, and what benefits we receive by the hand of man must be acknowledged to come from the hand of God; for every creature is that to us, and no more, that he makes it to be, and when he pleases, as he can make enemies to be at peace, so he can make strangers to be friends, friends in need, and those are friends indeed — friends *in adversity*, and that is *the time that a brother is born for.* Observe,

**1.** The general notice taken of the kindness which the natives of Malta showed to Paul and his company. They are called *barbarous people*, because they did not, in language and customs, conform either to the Greeks or Romans, who looked (superciliously enough) upon all but themselves as barbarians, though otherwise civilized enough, and perhaps in some cases more civil than they. These barbarous people, however they were called so, were full of humanity: They *showed us not little kindness.* So far were they from making a prey of this shipwreck, as many, I fear,

who are called Christian people, would have done, that they laid hold of it as an opportunity of showing mercy. *The Samaritan* is a better neighbour to the poor wounded man *than the priest or Levite*. And verily we have not found greater humanity among Greeks, or Romans, or Christians, than among these barbarous people; and it is written for our imitation, that we may hence learn to be compassionate to those that are in distress and misery, and to relieve and succour them to the utmost of our ability, as those *that know we ourselves are also in the body*. We should be ready to *entertain strangers, as Abraham, who sat at his tent door to invite passengers in* (~~scrip~~ Hebrews 13:2), but especially strangers in distress, as these were. *Honour all men*. If Providence hath so *appointed the bounds of our habitation* as to give us an opportunity of being frequently serviceable to persons at a loss, we should not place it among the inconveniences of our lot, but the advantages of it; because *it is more blessed to give than to receive*. Who knows but these barbarous people had their lot cast in this island for such a time as this!

2. A particular instance of their kindness: *They kindled a fire*, in some large hall or other, and *they received us everyone* — made room for us about the fire, and bade us all welcome, without asking either what country we were of or what religion. In swimming *to the shore*, and coming on *the broken pieces of the ship*, we must suppose that they were sadly wet, that they had not a dry thread on them; and, as if that were not enough, to complete the deluge, waters from above met those from below, and it rained so hard that this would wet them to the skin presently; and *it was a cold rain too*, so that they wanted nothing so much as a good fire (for they had eaten heartily but just before on ship-board), and this they got for them presently, *to warm them, and dry their clothes*. It is sometimes as much a piece of charity to poor families to supply them with fuel as with food or raiment. *Be you warmed*, is as necessary as *Be you filled*. When in the extremities of bad weather we find ourselves fenced against the rigours of the season, by the accommodations of a warm house, bed, clothes, and a good fire, we should think how many lie exposed *to the present rain, and to the cold*, and pity them, and pray for them, and help them if we can.

II. The further danger that Paul was in by a viper's fastening on his hand, and the unjust construction that the people put upon it. Paul is among strangers, and appears one of the meanest and most contemptible of the

company, therefore God distinguishes him, and soon causes him to be taken notice of.

**1.** When the fire was to be made, and too be made bigger, that so great a company might all have the benefit of it, Paul was as busy as any of them in gathering sticks. sticks, v. 3. Though he was free from all, and of greater account than any of them, *yet he made himself servant of all*. Paul was an industrious active man, and loved to be doing when any thing was to be done, and never contrived to take his ease. Paul was a humble self-denying man, and would stoop to any thing by which he might be serviceable, even to the gathering of sticks to make a fire of. We should reckon nothing below us but sin, and be willing to condescend to the meanest offices, if there be occasion, for the good of our brethren. The people were ready to help them; yet Paul, wet and cold as he is, will not throw it all upon them, but will help himself. Those that receive benefit by the fire should help to carry fuel to it.

**2.** The sticks being old dry rubbish, it happened there was a viper among them, that lay as dead till it came to the heat, and then revived, or lay quiet till it felt the fire, and then was provoked, and flew at him that unawares threw it into the fire, and *fastened upon his hand*, v. 3. Serpents and such venomous creatures commonly lie among sticks; hence we read of him *that leans on the wall, and a serpent bites him*, <sup><1059></sup>Amos 5:19. It was so common that people were by it frightened from tearing hedges (<sup><2108></sup>Ecclesiastes 10:8): *Whoso breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him*. As there is a snake under the green grass, so there is often under the dry leaves. See how many perils human life is exposed to, and what danger we are in from the inferior creatures, which have many of them become enemies to men, since men became rebels to God; and what a mercy it is that we are preserved from them as we are. We often meet with that which is mischievous where we expect that which is beneficial; and many come by hurt when they are honestly employed, and in the way of their duty.

**3.** The barbarous people concluded that Paul, being a prisoner, was certainly a murderer, who had appealed to Rome, to escape justice in his own country, and that this viper was sent by divine justice to be the avenger of blood; or, if they were not aware that he was a prisoner, they supposed that he was in his flight; and *when they saw the venomous animal hand on his hand*, which it seems he could not, or would not, immediately throw off, but let it hang, they concluded, “*No doubt this*

*man is a murderer, has shed innocent blood, and therefore, though he has escaped the sea, yet divine vengeance pursues him, and fastens upon him now that he is pleasing himself with the thoughts of that escape, and will not suffer him to live.*" Now in this we may see,

(1.) Some of the discoveries of natural light. They were barbarous people, perhaps had no books nor learning among them, and yet they knew naturally,

[1.] That there is a God that governs the world, and a providence that presides in all occurrences, that things do not come to pass by chance, no, not such a thing as this, but by divine direction.

[2.] That evil pursues sinners, that there are good works which God will reward and wicked works which he will punish; there is a divine *nemesis* — a *vengeance*, which sooner or later will reckon for enormous crimes. They believe not only that there is a God, but that this God hath said, *Vengeance is mine, I will repay*, even to death.

[3.] That murder is a heinous crime, and which shall not long go unpunished, that *whoso sheds man's blood*, if his blood be not shed by man (by the magistrate, as it ought to be) it shall be shed by the righteous Judge of heaven and earth, who is the avenger of wrong. Those that think they shall go unpunished in any evil way will be judged out of the mouth of these barbarians, who could say, without book, *Woe to the wicked, for it shall be ill with them, for the reward of their hands shall be given them*. Those who, because they have escaped many judgments are secure, and say, *We shall have peace though we go on*, and have their hearts so much the more *set to do evil because sentence against their evil works is not executed speedily*, may learn from these illiterate people that, though malefactors have escaped the vengeance of the sea, yet there is no outrunning divine justice, *vengeance suffers not to live*. In Job's time you might ask *those that to by the way*, ask the next body you met, and they would tell you that *the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction*.

(2.) Some of the mistakes of natural light, which needed to be rectified by divine revelation. In two things their knowledge was defective: —

[1.] That they thought all wicked people were punished in this life; that divine vengeance never suffers great and notorious sinners, such as murderers are, to live long; but that, if *they come up out of the pit, they*

shall be taken in the snare (<sup>218B</sup>Jeremiah 48:43, 44), if they flee from a lion, a bear shall meet them (<sup>318B</sup>Amos 5:19), if they escape being drowned, a viper shall fasten upon them; whereas it is not so. The wicked, even murderers, sometimes *live, become old, yea, are mighty in power*; for the day of vengeance is to come in the other world, *the great day of wrath*; and though some are made examples of in this world, to prove that there is a God and a providence, yet many are left unpunished, to prove that there is a judgment to come.

[2.] That they thought all who were remarkably afflicted in this life were wicked people; that a man on whose hand a viper fastens may thence be judged to be a murderer, as if those on whom the tower in Siloam fell must needs be greater sinners than all in Jerusalem. This mistake Job's friends went upon, in their judgment upon his case; but divine revelation sets this matter in a true light — that all things come ordinarily alike to all, that good men are oftentimes greatly afflicted in this life, for the exercise and improvement of their faith and patience.

4. When he shook off the viper from his hand, yet they expected that divine vengeance would ratify the censure they had passed, and *that he would have swollen* and burst, through the force of the poison, or *that he would have fallen down dead suddenly*. See how apt men are, when once they have got an ill opinion of a man, though ever so unjust, to abide by it, and to think that God must necessarily confirm and ratify their peevish sentence. It was well they did not knock him down themselves, when they saw he did not swell and fall down; but so considerate they are as to let Providence work, and to attend the motions of it.

**III.** Paul's deliverance from the danger, and the undue construction the people put upon this. The viper's fastening on his hand was a trial of his faith; and it was found to praise, and honour, and glory: for,

1. It does not appear that it put him into any fright or confusion at all. He did not shriek or start, nor, as it would be natural for us to do, throw it off with terror and precipitation; for he suffered it to hang on so long that the people had time to take notice of it and to make their remarks upon it. Such a wonderful presence of mind he had, and such a composure, as no man could have upon such a sudden accident, but by the special aids of divine grace, and the actual belief and consideration of that word of Christ

concerning his disciples (<sup><4168></sup>Mark 16:18), *They shall take up serpents.* This it is to have *the heart fixed, trusting in God.*

**2.** He carelessly *shook off the viper into the fire*, without any difficulty, calling for help, or any means used to loosen its hold; and it is probable that it was consumed in the fire. Thus, in the strength of the grace of Christ, believers shake off the temptations of Satan, with a holy resolution, saying, as Christ did, *Get thee behind me, Satan; The Lord rebuke thee;* and thus they *keep themselves, that the wicked one toucheth them not*, so as to fasten upon them, <sup><4158></sup>1 John 5:18. When we despise the censures and reproaches of men, and look upon them with a holy contempt, having the testimony of conscience for us, then we do, as Paul here, *shake off the viper into the fire.* It does us no harm, except we fret at it, or be deterred by it from our duty, or be provoked to render railing for railing.

**3.** He was none the worse. Those that thought it would have been his death *looked a great while, but saw no harm at all come to him.* God hereby intended to make him remarkable among these barbarous people, and so to make way for the entertainment of the gospel among them. It is reported that after this no venomous creature would live in that island, any more than in Ireland; but I do not find that the matter of fact is confirmed, though the popish writers speak of it with assurance.

**4.** They then magnified him as much as before they had vilified him: *They changed their minds, and said that he was a god* — an immortal god; for they thought it impossible that a mortal man should have a viper hang on his hand so long and be never the worse. See the uncertainty of popular opinion, how it turns with the wind, and how apt it is to run into extremes both ways; from *sacrificing to Paul and Barnabas to stoning them;* and here, from condemning him as a murderer to idolizing him as a god.

**IV.** The miraculous cure of an old gentleman that was ill of a fever, and of others that were otherwise diseased, by Paul. And, with these confirmations of the doctrine of Christ, no doubt there was a faithful publication of it. Observe,

**1.** The kind entertainment which *Publius, the chief man of the island*, gave to these distressed strangers; he had a considerable estate in the island, and some think was governor, and he *received them and lodged them three days very courteously*, that they might have time to furnish themselves in other places at the best hand. It is happy when God gives a large heart to

those to whom he has given a large estate. It became him, who was the chief man of the island, to be most hospitable and generous, — who was the richest man, to be rich in good works.

**2.** The illness of *the father of Publius*: He lay sick of a fever and a bloody flux, which often go together, and, when they do, are commonly fatal. Providence ordered it that he should be ill just at this time, that the cure of him might be a present recompence to Publius for his generosity, and the cure of him by miracle a recompence particularly for his kindness to Paul, whom he received in the name of a prophet, and had this prophet's reward.

**3.** His cure: Paul took cognizance of his case, and though we do not find he was urged to it, for they had no thought of any such thing, yet he entered in, not as a physician to heal him by medicines, but as an apostle to heal him by miracle; and he prayed to God, in Christ's name, for his cure, and then laid his hands on him, and he was perfectly well in an instant. Though he must needs be in years, yet he recovered his health, and the lengthening out of his life yet longer would be a mercy to him.

**4.** The cure of many others, who were invited by this cure to apply to Paul. If he can heal diseases so easily, so effectually, he shall soon have patients enough; and he *bade them all welcome*, and sent them away with what they came for. He did not plead that he was a stranger there, thrown accidentally among them, under no obligations to them and waiting to be gone by the first opportunity, and therefore might be excused from receiving their applications. No, a good man will endeavour to do good wherever the providence of God casts him. Paul reckoned himself a debtor, not only to the Greeks, but to the Barbarians, and thanked God for an opportunity of being useful among them. Nay, he was particularly obliged to these inhabitants of Malta for the seasonable shelter and supply they had afforded him, and hereby he did in effect discharge his quarters, which should encourage us to entertain strangers, for some thereby have entertained angels and some apostles unawares. God will not be behind-hand with any for kindness shown to his people in distress. We have reason to think that Paul with these cures preached the gospel to them, and that, coming thus confirmed and recommended, it was generally embraced among them. And, if so, never were any people so enriched by a shipwreck on their coasts as these Maltese were.



**V.** The grateful acknowledgement which even these barbarous people made of the kindness Paul had done them, in preaching Christ unto them. They were civil to him, and to the other ministers that were with him, who, it is likely, were assisting to him in preaching among them, v. 10.

**1.** They *honoured us with many honours*. They showed them all possible respect; they saw God honoured them, and therefore they justly thought themselves obliged to honour them, and thought nothing too much by which they might testify the esteem they had for them. Perhaps they made them free of their island by naturalizing them, and admitted them members of their guilds and fraternities. The faithful preachers of the gospel are worthy of a double honour, especially when they succeeded in their labours.

**2.** *When we departed, they loaded us with such things as were necessary;* or, they put on board such things as we had occasion for. Paul could not labour with his hands here, for he had nothing to work upon, and therefore accepted the kindness of the good people of Melita, not as a fee for his cures (freely he had received, and freely he gave), but as the relief of his wants, and theirs that were with him. And, having reaped of their spiritual things, it was but just they should make them those returns, ~~<BIB>~~1  
Corinthians 9:11.

## ~~<BIB>~~ ACTS 28:11-16

### PAUL AT ROME

We have here the progress of Paul's voyage towards Rome, and his arrival there at length. A rough and dangerous voyage he had hitherto had, and narrowly escaped with his life; but after a storm comes a calm: the latter part of his voyage was easy and quiet.

*Per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum,  
Tendimus ad Latium —*

*Through various hazards and events we move  
To Latium.*

*Tendimus ad coelum.  
We make for heaven.*

— *Dabit Deus his quoque finem.*  
*To these a period will be fixed by Heaven.*

We have here,

**I.** Their leaving Malta. That island was a happy shelter to them, but it was not their home; when they are refreshed they must put to sea again. The difficulties and discouragements we have met with in our Christian course must not hinder us from pressing forward. Notice is here taken,

**1.** Of the time of their departure: *After three months*, the three winter months. Better lie by, though they lay upon charges, than go forward while the season was dangerous. Paul had warned them against venturing to sea in winter weather, and they would not take the warning; but, now that they had learned it by the difficulties and dangers they had gone through, he needed not to warn them: their learning did them good when they had paid dearly for it. Experience is therefore called the mistress of fools, because those are fools that will not learn till experience has taught them.

**2.** Of the ship in which they departed. It was in a ship of Alexandria; so was that which was cast away, <sup>407b</sup>Acts 27:6. This ship had *wintered in that isle*, and was safe. See what different issues there are of men's undertakings in this world. Here were two ships, both of Alexandria, both bound for Italy, both thrown upon the same island, but one is wrecked there and the other is saved. Such occurrences may often be observed. Providence sometimes favours those that deal in the world, and prospers them, that people may be encouraged to set their hands to worldly business; at other times Providence crosses them, that people may be warned not to set their hearts upon it. Events are thus varied, that we may learn both how to want and how to abound. The historian takes notice of the sign of the ship, which probably gave it its name: it was *Castor and Pollux*. Those little foolish pagan deities, which the poets had made to preside over storms and to protect seafaring men, as gods of the sea, were painted or graven upon the fore-part of the ship, and thence the ship took its name. I suppose this is observed for no other reason than for the better ascertaining of the story, that ship being well known by that name and sign by all that dealt between Egypt and Italy. Dr. Lightfoot thinks that Luke mentions this circumstance to intimate the men's superstition, that they hoped they should have better sailing under this badge than they had had before.

## II. Their landing in or about Italy, and the pursuing of their journey towards Rome.

1. They landed first at Syracuse in Sicily, the chief city of that island. There they *tarry'd three days*, probably having some goods to put ashore, or some merchandise to make there; for it seems to have been a trading voyage that this ship made. Paul had now his curiosity gratified with the sight of places he had often heard of and wished to see, particularly Syracuse, a place of great antiquity and note; and yet, it should seem, there were no Christians there.

2. From Syracuse they came to Rhegium, a city in Italy, directly opposite to Messina in Sicily, belonging to the kingdom of Calabria or Naples. There, it seems they staid one day; and a very formal story the Romish legends tell of Paul's preaching here at this time, and the fish coming to the shore to hear him, — that with a candle he set a stone pillar on fire, and by that miracle convinced the people of the truth of his doctrine, and they were many of them baptized, and he ordained Stephen, one of his companions in this voyage, to be their bishop, — and all this, they tell you, was done in this one day; whereas it does not appear that they did so much as go ashore, but only came to an anchor in the road.

3. From Rhegium they came to Puteoli, a sea-port town not far from Naples, now called *Pozzolana*. The ship of Alexandria was bound for that port, and therefore there Paul, and the rest that were bound for Rome, were put ashore, and went the remainder of their way by land. At Puteoli they *found brethren*, Christians. Who brought the knowledge of Christ hither we are not told, but here it was, so wonderfully did the leaven of the gospel diffuse itself. God has many that serve and worship him in places where we little think he has. And observe,

(1.) Though it is probable there were but few brethren in Puteoli, yet Paul found them out; either they heard of him, or he enquired them out, but as it were by instinct they got together. Brethren in Christ should find out one another, and keep up communion with each other, as those of the same country do in a foreign land.

(2.) They desired Paul and his companions to *tarry with them seven days*, that is, to forecast to stay at least one Lord's day with them, and to assist them in their public worship that day. They knew not whether ever they should see Paul at Puteoli again, and therefore he must not go without

giving them a sermon or two, or more. And Paul was willing to allow them so much of his time; and the centurion under whose command Paul now was, perhaps having himself friends or business at Puteoli, agreed to stay one week there, to oblige Paul.

4. From Puteoli they went forward towards Rome; whether they travelled on foot, or whether they had beasts provided for them to ride on (as ~~Acts~~ Acts 23:24), does not appear; but to Rome they must go, and this was their last stage.

**III.** The meeting which the Christians at Rome gave to Paul. It is probable that notice was sent to them by the Christians at Puteoli, as soon as ever Paul had come thither, how long he intended to stay there, and when he would set forward for Rome, which gave an opportunity for this interview. Observe,

1. The great honour they did to Paul. They had heard much of his fame, what use God had made of him, and what eminent service he had done to the kingdom of Christ in the world, and to what multitudes of souls he had been a spiritual father. They had heard of his sufferings, and how God had owned him in them, and therefore they not only longed to see him, but thought themselves obliged to show him all possible respect, as a glorious advocate for the cause of Christ. He had some time ago written a long epistle to them, and a most excellent one, *the epistle to the Romans*, in which he had not only expressed his great kindness for them, but had given them a great many useful instructions, in return for which they show him this respect. They *went to meet him*, that they might bring him in state, as ambassadors and judges make their public entry, though he was a prisoner. Some of them went as far as *Appiiforum*, which was fifty-one miles from Rome; others to a place called the *Three Taverns*, which was twenty-eight miles (some reckon it thirty-three miles) from Rome. They are to be commended for it, that they were so far from being ashamed of him, or afraid of owning him, because he was a prisoner, that for that very reason they counted him worthy of double honour, and were the more careful to show him respect.

2. The great comfort Paul had in this. Now that he was drawing near to Rome, and perhaps heard at Puteoli what character the emperor Nero now had, and what a tyrant he had of late become, he began to have some melancholy thoughts about his appeal to Caesar, and the consequences of

it. He was drawing near to Rome, where he had never been, where there were few that knew him or that he knew, and what things might befall him here he could not tell; but he began to grow dull upon it, till he met with these good people that came from Rome to show him respect; and *when he saw them,*

**(1.)** He *thanked God*. We may suppose he thanked them for their civility, told them again and again how kindly he took it; but this was not all: he *thanked God*. Note, If our friends be kind to us, it is God that makes them so, that puts it into their hearts, and into the power of their hands, to be so, and we must give him the glory of it. He thanked God, no doubt, for the civility and generosity of the barbarous people at Melita, but much more for the pious care of the Christian people at Rome for him. When he saw so many Christians that were of Rome, he thanked God that the gospel of Christ had had such wonderful success there in the metropolis of the empire. When we go abroad, or but look abroad, into the world, and meet with those, even in strange places, that bear up Christ's name, and fear God, and serve him, we should lift up our hearts to heaven in thanksgiving; blessed be God that there are so many excellent ones on this earth, bad as it is. Paul had thanked God for the Christians at Rome before he had ever seen them, upon the report he had heard concerning them (~~ROM~~ Romans 1:8): *I thank my God for you all*. But now that he saw them (and perhaps they appeared more fashionable and genteel people than most he had conversed with, or more grave, serious, and intelligent, than most) *he thanked God*. But this was not all:

**(2.)** He *took courage*. It put new life into him, cheered up his spirits, and banished his melancholy, and now he can enter Rome a prisoner as cheerfully as ever he had entered Jerusalem at liberty. he finds there are those there who love and value him, and whom he may both converse with and consult with as his friends, which will take off much of the tediousness of his imprisonment, and the terror of his appearing before Nero. Note, it is an encouragement to those who are travelling towards heaven to meet with their fellow travellers, who are their *companions in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ*. When we see the numerous and serious assemblies of good Christians, we should not only give thanks to God, but take courage to ourselves. And this is a good reason why respect should be shown to good ministers, especially when they are in sufferings, and have contempt put upon them, that it encourages them, and makes both their sufferings and their services more easy. Yet it is observable that

though the Christians at Rome were now so respectful to Paul, and he had promised himself so much from their respect, yet they failed him when he most needed them; for he says (<sup><5016></sup>2 Timothy 4:16), *At my first answer, no man stood with me, but all men forsook me.* They could easily take a ride of forty or fifty miles to go and meet Paul, for the pleasantness of the journey; but to venture the displeasure of the emperor and the disoblising of other great men, by appearing in defence of Paul and giving evidence for him, here they desire to be excused; when it comes to this, they will rather ride as far out of town to miss him as now they did to meet him, which is an intimation to us to cease from man, and to encourage ourselves in the Lord our God. The courage we take from his promises will never fail us, when we shall be ashamed of that which we took from men's compliments. *Let God be true, but every man a liar.*

**IV.** The delivering of Paul into custody at Rome, v. 16. He is now come to his journey's end. And,

**1.** He is still a prisoner. He had longed to see Rome, but, when he comes there, he is delivered, with other prisoners, to the *captain of the guard*, and can see no more of Rome than he will permit him. How many great men had made their entry into Rome, crowned and in triumph, who really were the plagues of their generation! But here a good man makes his entry into Rome, chained and triumphed over as a poor captive, who was really the greatest blessing to his generation. This thought is enough to put one for ever out of conceit with this world.

**2.** Yet he has some favour shown him. He is a prisoner, but not a close prisoner, not in the common jail: *Paul was suffered to dwell by himself*, in some convenient private lodgings which his friends there provided for him, and a soldier was appointed to be his guard, who, we hope, was civil to him, and let him take all the liberty that could be allowed to a prisoner, for he must be very ill-natured indeed that could be so to such a courteous obliging man as Paul. Paul, being suffered to dwell by himself, could the better enjoy himself, and his friends, and his God, than if he had been lodged with the other prisoners. Note, This may encourage God's prisoners, that he can give them favour in the eyes of those that carry them captive (<sup><1946></sup>Psalm 106:46), as Joseph in the eyes of his keeper (<sup><1121></sup>Genesis 39:21), and Jehoiachin in the eyes of the king of Babylon, (<sup><1257></sup>2 Kings 25:27, 28. When God does not deliver his people presently out of

bondage, yet, if he either make it easy to them or them easy under it, they have reason to be thankful.

## ACTS 28:17-22

### PAUL AT ROME

Paul, with a great deal of expense and hazard, is brought a prisoner to Rome, and when he has come nobody appears to prosecute him or lay any thing to his charge; but he must call his own cause; and here he represents it to the chief of the Jews at Rome. It was not long since, by an edict of Claudius, all the Jews were banished from Rome, and kept out till his death; but, in the five years since then, many Jews had come thither, for the advantage of trade, though it does not appear that they were allowed any synagogue there or place of public worship; but these *chief of the Jews* were those of best figure among them, the most distinguished men of that religion, who had the best estates and interests. *Paul called them together*, being desirous to stand right in their opinion, and that there might be a good understanding between him and them. And here we are told,

**I.** What he said to them, and what account he gave them of his cause. He speaks respectfully to them, calls them men and brethren, and thereby intimates that he expects to be treated by them both as a man and as a brother, and engages to treat them as such and to tell them nothing but the truth; for *we are members one of another — all we are brethren*. Now,

**1.** He professes his own innocency, and that he had not given any just occasion to the Jews to bear him such an ill will as generally they did: “I have *committed nothing against the people* of the Jews, have done nothing to the prejudice of their religion or civil liberties, have added no affliction to their present miseries, they know I have not; nor have I committed any thing *against the customs of our fathers*, either by abrogating or by innovating in religion.” It is true Paul did not impose the customs of the fathers upon the Gentiles: they were never intended for them. But it is as true that he never opposed them in the Jews, but did himself, when he was among them, conform to them. He never quarrelled with them for practising according to the usages of their own religion, but only for their enmity to the Gentiles, <sup><R12></sup>Galatians 2:12. Paul had the testimony of his conscience for him that he had done his duty to the Jews.

2. He modestly complains of the hard usage he had met with — that, though he had given them no offence, yet *he was delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans*. If he had spoken the whole truth in this matter, it would have looked worse than it did upon the Jews, for they would have murdered him without any colour of law or justice if the Romans had not protected him; but, however, they accused him as a criminal, before Felix the governor, and, demanding judgment against him, were, in effect delivering him prisoner into the hands of the Romans, when he desired no more than a fair and impartial trial by their own law.

3. He declares the judgment of the Roman governors concerning him, v. 18. They examined him, enquired into his case, heard what was to be said against him, and what he had to say for himself. The chief captain examined him, so did Felix, and Festus, and Agrippa, and they could find no cause of death in him; nothing appeared to the contrary but that he was an honest, quiet, conscientious, good man, and therefore they would never gratify the Jews with a sentence of death upon him; but, on the contrary, would have let him go, and have let him go on in his work too, and have given him no interruption, for they all heard him and liked his doctrine well enough. It was for the honour of Paul that those who most carefully examined his case acquitted him, and none condemned him but unheard, and such as were prejudiced against him.

4. He pleads the necessity he was under to remove himself and his cause to Rome; and that it was only in his own defence, and not with any design to recriminate, or exhibit a cross bill against the complainants, (v. 19): *When the Jews spoke against it, and entered a caveat against his discharge, designing, if they could not have him condemned to die, yet to have him made a prisoner for life, he was constrained to appeal unto Caesar*, finding that the governors, one after another, stood so much in awe of the Jews that they could not discharge him, for fear of making him their enemies, which made it necessary for him to pray the assistance of the higher powers. This was all he aimed at in this appeal; not to accuse his nation, but only to vindicate himself. Every man has a right to plead in his own defence, who yet ought not to find fault with his neighbours. It is an invidious thing to accuse, especially to accuse a nation, such a nation. Paul made intercession for them, but never against them. The Roman government had at this time an ill opinion of the Jewish nation, as factious, turbulent, disaffected, and dangerous; and it had been an easy thing for a man with such a fluent tongue as Paul had, a citizen of Rome,



and so injured as he was, to have exasperated the emperor against the Jewish nation. But Paul would not for ever so much do such a thing; he was for making the best of every body, and not making bad worse.

**5.** He puts his sufferings upon the true footing, and gives them such an account of the reason of them as should engage them not only not to join with his persecutors against him, but to concern themselves for him, and to do what they could on his behalf (v. 20): “*For this cause I have called for you, not to quarrel with you, for I have no design to incense the government against you, but to see you and speak with you as my countrymen, and men that I would keep up a correspondence with, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.*” He carried the mark of his imprisonment about with him, and probably was chained to the soldier that kept him; and it was,

**(1.)** Because he preached that the Messiah was come, who was the hope of Israel, he whom Israel hoped for. “Do not all the Jews agree in this, that the Messiah will be the glory of his people Israel? And therefore he is to be hoped for, and this Messiah I preach, and prove he is come. They would keep up such a hope of a Messiah yet to come as must end in a despair of him; I preach such a hope in a Messiah already come as must produce a joy in him.”

**(2.)** Because he preached that the resurrection of the dead would come. This also was the hope of Israel; so he had called it, <sup>426</sup>Acts 23:6; 24:15; 26:6, 7. “They would have you still expect a Messiah that would free you from the Roman yoke, and make you great and prosperous upon earth, and it is this that occupies their thoughts; and they are angry at me for directing their expectations to the great things of another world, and persuading them to embrace a Messiah who will secure those to them, and not external power and grandeur. I am for bringing you to the spiritual and eternal blessedness upon which our fathers by faith had their eye, and this is what they hate me for, — because I would take you off from that which is the cheat of Israel, and will be its shame and ruin, the notion of a temporal Messiah, and lead you to that which is the true and real hope of Israel, and the genuine sense of all the promises made to the fathers, a spiritual kingdom of holiness and love set up in the hearts of men, to be the pledge of, and preparative for, the joyful resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.”

## II. What was their reply. They own,

**1.** That they had nothing to say in particular against him; nor had any instructions to appear as his prosecutors before the emperor, either by letter or word of mouth (v. 21): “*We have neither received letters out of Judea concerning thee (have no orders to prosecute thee) nor have any of the brethren of the Jewish nation that have lately come up to Rome (as many occasions drew the Jews thither now that their nation was a province of that empire) shown or spoken any harm of thee.*” This was very strange, that that restless and inveterate rage of the Jews which had followed Paul wherever he went should not follow him to Rome, to get him condemned there. Some think they told a lie here, and had orders to prosecute him, but durst not own it, being themselves obnoxious to the emperor's displeasure, who though he had not, like his predecessors, banished them all from Rome, yet gave them no countenance there. But I am apt to think that what they said was true, and Paul now found he had gained the point he aimed at in appealing to Caesar, which was to remove his cause into a court to which they durst not follow it. This was David's policy, and it was his security (<sup>421</sup>1 Samuel 27:1): *There is nothing better for me than to escape into the land of the Philistines, and Saul shall despair of me, to seek me any more in any coasts of Israel; so shall I escape out of his hands:* and it proved so, v. 4. *When Saul heard that David had fled to Gath, he sought no more again for him.* Thus did Paul by his appeal: he fled to Rome, where he was out of their reach; and they said, “Even let him go.”

**2.** That they desired to know particularly concerning the doctrine he preached, and the religion he took so much pains to propagate in the face of so much opposition (v. 22): “*We desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest — ha phroneis* what thy opinions or sentiments are, what are those things which thou art so wise about, and hast such a relish of and such a zeal for; for, though we know little else of Christianity, we know *it is a sect every where spoken against.*” Those who said this scornful spiteful word of the Christian religion were Jews, *the chief of the Jews at Rome*, who boasted of their knowledge (<sup>427</sup>Romans 2:17), and yet this was all they knew concerning the Christian religion, that it was a *sect every where spoken against.* They put it into an ill name, and then ran it down.

**(1.)** They looked upon it to be a sect, and this was false. True Christianity establishes that which is of common concern to all mankind, and is not built upon such narrow opinions and private interests as sects commonly

owe their original to. It aims at no worldly benefit or advantage as sects do; but all its gains are spiritual and eternal. And, besides, it has a direct tendency to the uniting of the children of men, and not the dividing of them, and setting them at variance, as sects have.

(2.) They said it was every where spoken against, and this was too true. All that they conversed with spoke against it, and therefore they concluded every body did: most indeed did. It is, and always has been, the lot of Christ's holy religion to be every where spoken against.

## ACTS 28:23-29

### PAUL AT ROME

We have here a short account of a long conference which Paul had with the Jews at Rome about the Christian religion. Though they were so far prejudiced against it, because it was every where spoken against, as to call it a *sect*, yet they were willing to give it a hearing, which was more than the Jews at Jerusalem would do. It is probable that these Jews at Rome, being men of larger acquaintance with the world and more general conversation, were more free in their enquiries than the bigoted Jews at Jerusalem were, and would not answer this matter before they heard it.

I. We are here told how Paul managed this conference in defence of the Christian religion. The Jews appointed the time, a day was set for this dispute, that all parties concerned might have sufficient notice, v. 23. Those Jews seemed well disposed to receive conviction, and yet it did not prove that they all were so. Now when the day came,

1. There were *many got together to Paul*. Though he was a prisoner and could not come out to them, yet they were willing to come to him to his lodging. And the confinement he was now under, if duly considered, instead of prejudicing them against his doctrine, ought to confirm it to them; for it was a sign not only that he believed it, but that he thought it worth suffering for. One would visit such a man as Paul in his prison rather than not have instruction from him. And he made room for them in his lodging, not fearing to give offence to the government, so that he might do good to them.

**2.** He was very large and full in his discourse with them, seeking their conviction more than his own vindication.

**(1.)** He expounded, or explained, the kingdom of God to them, — showed them the nature of that kingdom and the glorious purposes and designs of it, that it is heavenly and spiritual, seated in the minds of men, and shines not in external pomp, but in purity of heart and life. That which kept the Jews in their unbelief was a misunderstanding of the kingdom of God, as if it came with observation; let but that be expounded to them, and set in a true light, and they will be brought into obedience to it.

**(2.)** He not only expounded the kingdom of God, but he testified it, — plainly declared it to them, and confirmed it by incontestable proofs, that the kingdom of God by the Messiah's administration was come, and was now set up in the world. He attested the extraordinary powers in the kingdom of grace by which bore his testimony to it from his own experience of its power and influence upon him, and the manner of his being brought into subjection to it.

**(3.)** He not only expounded and testified the kingdom of God, but he persuaded them, urged it upon their consciences and pressed them with all earnestness to embrace the kingdom of God, and submit to it, and not to persist in an opposition to it. He followed his doctrine (the explication and confirmation of it) with a warm and lively application to his hearers, which is the most proper and profitable method of preaching.

**(4.)** He persuaded them concerning Jesus. The design and tendency of his whole discourse were to bring them to Christ, to convince them of his being the Messiah, and to engage them to believe in him as he is offered in the gospel. He urged upon them, *ta peri tou Iesou* — *the things concerning Jesus*, the prophecies of him, which he read to them *out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets*, as pointing at the Messiah, and showed how they had all had their accomplishment in this Jesus. They being Jews, he dealt with them out of the scriptures of the Old Testament, and demonstrated that these were so far from making against Christianity that they were the great proofs of it; so that, if we compare the history of the New Testament with the prophecy of the Old, we must conclude that this Jesus is he that should come, and we are to look for no other.

**3.** He was very long; for he continued his discourse, and it should seem to have been a continued discourse, from *morning till evening*; perhaps it

was a discourse eight or ten hours long. The subject was curious — he was full of it — it was of vast importance — he was in good earnest, and his heart was upon it — he knew not when he should have such another opportunity, and therefore, without begging pardon for tiring their patience, he kept them all day; but it is probable that he spent some of the time in prayer with them and for them.

**II.** What was the effect of this discourse. One would have thought that so good a cause as that of Christianity, and managed by such a skilful hand as Paul's, could not but carry the day, and that all the hearers would have yielded to it presently; but it did not prove so: the child Jesus is set for the fall of some and the rising again of others, a foundation stone to some and a stone of stumbling to others.

**1.** *They did not agree among themselves*, v. 25. Some of them thought Paul was in the right, others would not admit it. This is that division which Christ came to send, that fire which he came to kindle, ~~☞~~ Luke 12:49, 51. Paul preached with a great deal of plainness and clearness, and yet his hearers could not agree about the sense and evidence of what he preached.

**2.** *Some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not*, v. 24. There was the disagreement. Such as this has always been the success of the gospel; to some it has been *a savour of life unto life*, to others *a savour of death unto death*. Some are wrought upon by the word, and others hardened; some receive the light, and others shut their eyes against it. So it was among Christ's hearers, and the spectators of his miracles, some believed and some blasphemed. If all had believed, there had been no disagreement; so that all the blame of the division lay upon those who would not believe.

**III.** The awakening word which Paul said to them at parting. He perceived by what they muttered that there were many among them, and perhaps the greater part, that were obstinate, and would not yield to the conviction of what he said; and they were getting up to be gone, they had had enough of it: "Hold," says Paul, "take one word with you before you go, and consider of it when you come home: what do you think will be the effect of your obstinate infidelity? What will you do in the end hereof? What will it come to?"

**1.** "You will by the righteous judgment of God be sealed up under unbelief. You harden your own hearts, and God will harden them as he did

Pharaoh's'; and this is what was prophesied of concerning you. Turn to that scripture (<sup>2369</sup>Isaiah 6:9, 10), and read it seriously, and tremble lest the case there described should prove to be your case." As there are in the Old Testament gospel promises, which will be accomplished in all that believe, so there are gospel threatenings of spiritual judgments, which will be fulfilled in those that believe not; and this is one. it is part of the commission given to Isaiah the prophet; he is sent to make those worse that would not be made better. *Well spoke the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers.* What was spoken by JEHOVAH is here said to be spoken by the Holy Ghost, which proves that the Holy Ghost is God; and what was spoken to Isaiah is here said to be spoken by him to their fathers, for he was ordered to tell the people what God said to him; and, though what is there said had in it much of terror to the people and of grief to the prophet, yet it is here said to be well spoken. Hezekiah said concerning a message of wrath, *Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken,* <sup>2398</sup>Isaiah 39:8. And *he that believes not shall be damned* is gospel, as well as, *He that believes shall be saved,* <sup>4166</sup>Mark 16:16. Or this may be explained by that of our Saviour (<sup>4187</sup>Matthew 15:7), "*Well did Esaias prophesy of you.* The Holy Ghost said to your fathers, that which would be fulfilled in you, *Hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand.*"

(1.) "That which was their great sin against God is yours; and that is this, you will not see. You shut your eyes against the most convincing evidence possible, and will not admit the conclusion, though you cannot deny the premises: *Your eyes you have closed,*" v. 27. This intimates an obstinate infidelity, and a willing slavery to prejudice. "As your fathers would not see God's hand lifted up against them in his judgments (<sup>2391</sup>Isaiah 26:11), so you will not see God's hand stretched out to you in gospel grace." It was true of these unbelieving Jews that they were prejudiced against the gospel; they did not see, because they were resolved they would not, and none so blind as those that will not see. They would not prosecute their convictions, and for this reason would not admit them. They have purposely *closed their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes* the great things which belong to their everlasting peace, should see the glory of God, the amiableness of Christ, the deformity of sin, the beauty of holiness, the vanity of this world, and the reality of another. They will not be changed and governed by these truths, and therefore will not receive the evidence of them, *lest they should hear with their ears* that which they are loth to hear, the wrath of God revealed from heaven against them, and the

will of God revealed from heaven to them. They stop their ears, like the deaf adder, that *will not hearken to the voice of the charmer, charm he ever so wisely*. Thus their fathers did; they *would not hear*, <sup><307></sup>Zechariah 7:11, 12. And that which they are afraid of in shutting up their eyes and ears, and barricading (as it were) both their learning senses against him that made both the hearing ear and the seeing eye, is, *lest they should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them*. They kept their mind in the dark, or at least in a constant confusion and tumult, lest, if they should admit a considerate sober thought, they should understand with their heart how much it is both their duty and their interest to be religious, and so by degrees the truth should be too hard for them, and they should be converted from the evil ways which they take pleasure in, to those exercises to which they have now an aversion. Observe, God's method is to bring people first to see and he and so to understand with their hearts, and then to convert them, and bow their wills, and so heal them, which is the regular way of dealing with a rational soul; and therefore Satan prevents the conversion of souls to God by blinding the mind and darkening the understanding, <sup><404></sup>2 Corinthians 4:4. And the case is very sad when the sinner joins with him herein, and puts out his own eyes. *Ut liberius peccent, libenter ignorant — They plunge into ignorance, that they may sin the more freely*. They are in love with their disease, and are afraid lest God should heal them; like Babylon of old, We would have healed her, and she would not be healed, <sup><259></sup>Jeremiah 51:9. This was the sin.

(2.) “That which was the great judgment of God upon them for this sin is his judgment upon you, and that is, you shall be blind. God will give you up to a judicial infatuation: *Hearing you shall hear* — you shall have the word of God preached to you over and over — *but you shall not understand* it; because you will not give your minds to understand it, God will not give you strength and grace to understand it. *Seeing you shall see* — you shall have abundance of miracles and signs done before your eyes — *but you shall not perceive* the convincing evidence of them. Take heed lest what Moses said to your fathers should be true of you (<sup><529></sup>Deuteronomy 29:4), *The Lord has not given you a heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day*; and what Isaiah said to the men of his generation (<sup><239></sup>Isaiah 29:10-12), *The Lord has poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes.*” What with their resisting the grace of God and rebelling against the light, and God's

withdrawing and withholding his grace and light from them, — what with their not receiving the love of the truth, and God's giving them up for that to strong delusions, to believe a lie, — what with their wilful and what with their judicial hardness, *the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing*. They are stupid and senseless, and not wrought upon by all that can be said to them. No physic that can be given them operates upon them, nor will reach them, and therefore their disease must be adjudged incurable, and their case desperate. How should those be happy that will not be healed of a disease that makes them miserable? And how should those be healed that will not be converted to the use of the methods of cure? And how should those be converted that will not be convinced either of their disease or of their remedy? And how should those be convinced that *shut their eyes and stop their ears*? Let all that hear the gospel, and do not heed it, tremble at this doom; for, when once they are thus given up to hardness of heart, they are already in the suburbs of hell; for who shall heal them, if God do not?

2. “Your unbelief will justify God in sending the gospel to the Gentile world, which is the thing you look upon with such a jealous eye (v. 28): therefore seeing you put the grace of God away from you, and will not submit to the power of divine truth and love, seeing you will not be converted and healed in the methods which divine wisdom has appointed, *therefore be it known unto you that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles*, that salvation which was of the Jews only (~~402~~ John 4:22), the offer of it is made to them, the means of it afforded to them, and they stand fairer for it than you do; it is sent to them, and they will hear it, and receive it, and be happy in it.” Now Paul designs hereby,

(1.) To abate their displeasure at the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles, by showing them the absurdity of it. They were angry that the salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles, and thought it was too great a favour done to them; but, if they thought that salvation of so small a value as not to be worthy of their acceptance, surely they could not grudge it to the Gentiles as too good for them, nor envy them for it. The salvation of God was sent into the world, the Jews had the first offer of it, it was fairly proposed to them, it was earnestly pressed upon them, but they refused it; they would not accept the invitation which was given to them first to the wedding-feast and therefore must thank themselves if other guests be invited. If they will not strike the bargain, nor come up to the terms, they ought not to be angry at those that will. They cannot complain that the



Gentiles took it over their heads, or out of their hands, for they had quite taken their hands off it, nay, *they had lifted up the heel against it*; and therefore it is their fault, for *it is through their fall that salvation is come to the Gentiles*, <sup><6111></sup>Romans 11:11.

(2.) To improve their displeasure at the favour done to the Gentiles to their advantage, and to bring good out of that evil; for when he had spoken of this very thing in his epistle to the Romans, the benefit which the Gentiles had by the unbelief and rejection of the Jews, he says, he took notice of it on purpose that he might provoke his dear countrymen the Jews *to a holy emulation, and might save some of them*, <sup><6114></sup>Romans 11:14. The Jews have rejected the gospel of Christ, and pushed it off to the Gentiles, but it is not yet too late to repent of their refusal, and to accept of the salvation which they did make light of; they may say No, and take it, as the elder brother in the parable, who, when he was bidden to *go work in the vineyard*, first said, *I will not*, and yet *afterwards repented and went*, <sup><4129></sup>Matthew 21:29. Is the gospel sent to the Gentiles? Let us go after it rather than come short of it. And will they hear it, who are thought to be out of hearing, and have been so long like the idols they worshipped, *that have ears and hear not*? And shall not we hear it, whose privilege it is to have God so nigh to us in all that we call upon him for? Thus he would have them to argue, and to be shamed into the belief of the gospel by the welcome it met with among the Gentiles. And, if it had not that effect upon them, it would aggravate their condemnation, as it did that of the scribes and Pharisees, who, when they saw the publicans and harlots submit to John's baptism, did not afterwards thereupon repent of their folly, *that they might believe him*, <sup><4132></sup>Matthew 21:32.

**IV.** The breaking up of the assembly, as it should seem, in some disorder.

1. They turned their backs upon Paul. Those of them that believed not were extremely nettled at that last word which he said, that they should be judicially blinded, and that the light of the gospel should shine among those that sat in darkness. *When Paul had said these words*, he had said enough for them, and *they departed*, perhaps not so much enraged as some others of their nation had been upon the like occasion, but stupid and unconcerned, no more affected, either with those terrible words in the close of his discourse or all the comfortable words he had spoken before, than the seats they sat on. They departed, many of them with a resolution

never to hear Paul preach again, nor trouble themselves with further enquiries about this matter.

2. They set their faces one against another; for they had great disputes among themselves. There was not only a quarrel between those who believed and those who believed not, but even among those who believed not there were debates. Those that agreed to depart from Paul, yet agreed not in the reasons why they departed, but had *great reasoning among themselves*. Many have great reasoning who yet do not reason right, can find fault with one another's opinions, and yet not yield to truth. Nor will men's reasoning among themselves convince them, without the grace of God to open their understandings.

## ⌄ ACTS 28:30-31

### PAUL PREACHES TWO YEARS AT ROME

We are here taking our leave of the history of blessed Paul; and therefore, since God saw it not fit that we should know any more of him, we should carefully take notice of every particular of the circumstances in which we must here leave him.

I. It cannot but be a trouble to us that we must leave him in bonds for Christ, nay, and that we have no prospect given us of his being set at liberty. *Two whole years* of that man's life are here spent in confinement, and, for aught that appears, he was never enquired after, all that time, by those whose prisoner he was. He appealed to Caesar, in hope of a speedy discharge from his imprisonment, the governors having signified to his imperial majesty concerning the prisoner *that he had done nothing worthy of death or bonds*, and yet he is detained a prisoner. So little reason have we to trust in men, especially despised prisoners in great men; witness the case of Joseph, whom *the chief butler remembered not, but forgot*, <sup>⌄423</sup>Genesis 40:23. Yet some think that though it be not mentioned here, yet it was in the former of these two years, and early too in that year, that he was first brought before Nero, and then his bonds in Christ were manifest in Caesar's court, as he says, <sup>⌄1013</sup>Philippians 1:13. And at this first answer it was that *no man stood by him*, <sup>⌄5046</sup>2 Timothy 4:16. But it seems, instead of being set at liberty upon this appeal, as he expected, he hardly escaped out of the emperor's hands with his life; he

calls it a deliverance out of the mouth of the lion, ~~SEMI~~2 Timothy 4:17, and his speaking there of his first answer intimates that since that he had a second, in which he had come off better, and yet was not discharged. During these two years' imprisonment he wrote his epistle to the Galatians, then his second epistle to Timothy, then those to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and to Philemon, in which he mentions several things particularly concerning his imprisonment; and, lastly, his epistle to the Hebrews just after he was set at liberty, as Timothy also was, who, coming to visit him, was upon some account or other made his fellow-prisoner (*with whom*, writes Paul to the Hebrews, 13:23, *if he come shortly, I will see you*), but how or by what means he obtained his liberty we are not told, only that two years he was a prisoner. Tradition says that after his discharge he went from Italy to Spain, thence to Crete, and so with Timothy into Judea, and thence went to visit the churches in Asia, and at length came a second time to Rome, and there was beheaded in the last year of Nero. But Baronius himself owns that there is no certainty of any thing concerning him betwixt his release from this imprisonment and his martyrdom; but it is said by some that Nero, having, when he began to play the tyrant, set himself against the Christians, and persecuted them (and he was the first of the emperors that made a law against them, as Tertullian says, *Apol. cap. 5*), the church at Rome was much weakened by that persecution, and this brought Paul the second time to Rome, to re-establish the church there, and to comfort the souls of the disciples that were left, and so he fell a second time into Nero's hand. And Chrysostom relates that a young woman that was one of Nero's misses (to speak modishly) being converted, by Paul's preaching, to the Christian faith, and so brought off from the lewd course of life she had lived, Nero was incensed against Paul for it, and ordered him first to be imprisoned, and then put to death. But to keep to this short account here given of it, 1. It would grieve one to think that such a useful man as Paul was should be so long in restraint. Two years he was a prisoner under Felix (~~ACT~~ Acts 24:27), and, besides all the time that passed between that and his coming to Rome, he is here two years more a prisoner under Nero. How many churches might Paul have planted, how many cities and nations might he have brought over to Christ, in these five years' time (for so much it was at least), if he had been at liberty! But God is wise, and will show that he is not debtor to the most useful instruments he employs, but can and will carry on his own interest, both without their services and by their

sufferings. Even Paul's bonds fell out *to the furtherance of the gospel*, <sup><3112></sup>Philippians 1:12-14.

**2.** Yet even Paul's imprisonment was in some respects a kindness to him, for these *two years he dwelt in his own hired house*, and that was more, for aught I know, than ever he had done before. He had always been accustomed to sojourn in the houses of others, now he has a house of his own — his own while he pays the rent of it; and such a retirement as this would be a refreshment to one who had been all his days an itinerant. He had been accustomed to be always upon the remove, seldom staid long at a place, but now he lived for two years in the same house; so that the bringing of him into this prison was like Christ's call to his disciples *to come into a desert place, and rest awhile*, <sup><416></sup>Mark 6:31. When he was at liberty, he was in continual fear by reason of *the lying in wait of the Jews* (<sup><4119></sup>Acts 20:19), but now his prison was his castle. Thus *out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong sweetness*.

**II.** Yet it is a pleasure to us (for we are sure it was to him) that, though we leave him in bonds for Christ, yet we leave him at work for Christ, and this made his bonds easy that he was not by them bound out from serving God and doing good. His prison becomes a temple, a church, and then it is to him a palace. His hands are tied, but, thanks be to God, his mouth is not stopped; a faithful zealous minister can better bear any hardship than being silenced. Here is Paul a prisoner, and yet a preacher; he is bound, but the word of the Lord is not bound. When he wrote his epistle to the Romans, he said *he longed to see them, that he might impart unto them some spiritual gift* (<sup><811></sup>Romans 1:11); he was glad *to see some of them* (v. 15), but it would not be half his joy unless he could impart to them some spiritual gift, which here he has an opportunity to do, and then he will not complain of his confinement. Observe,

**1.** To whom he preached: to all that had a mind to hear him, whether Jews or Gentiles. Whether he had liberty to go to other houses to preach does not appear; it is likely not; but whoever would had liberty to come to his house to hear, and they were welcome: *He received all that came to him*. Note, Ministers' doors should be open to such as desire to receive instruction from them, and they should be glad of an opportunity to advise those that are in care about their souls. Paul could not preach in a synagogue, or any public place of meeting that was sumptuous and capacious, but he preached in a poor cottage of his own. Note, When we

cannot do what we would in the service of God we must do what we can. Those ministers that have but little hired houses should rather preach in them, if they may be allowed to do that, than be silent. *He received all that came to him*, and was not afraid of the greatest, nor ashamed of the meanest. He was ready to preach on the first day of the week to Christians, on the seventh day to Jews, and to all who would come on any day of the week; and he might hope the better to speed because *they came in unto him*, which supposed a desire to be instructed and a willingness to learn, and where these are it is probable that some good may be done.

**2.** What he preached. He does not fill their heads with curious speculations, nor with matters of state and politics, but he keeps to his text, minds his business as an apostle.

**(1.)** He is God's ambassador, and therefore *preaches the kingdom of God*, does all he can to preach it up, negotiates the affairs of it, in order to the advancing of all its true interests. He meddles not with the affairs of the kingdoms of men; let those treat of them whose work it is. He preaches the kingdom of God among men, and the word of that kingdom; the same that he defended in his public disputes, *testifying the kingdom of God* (v. 23), he enforced in his public preaching, as that which, if received aright, will make us all wise and good, wiser and better, which is the end of preaching.

**(2.)** He is an agent for Christ, a friend of the bridegroom, and therefore *teaches those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ* — the whole history of Christ, his incarnation, doctrine, life, miracles, death, resurrection, ascension; all that relates to the mystery of godliness. Paul stuck still to his principle — to know and preach *nothing but Christ, and him crucified*. Ministers, when in their preaching they are tempted to diverge from that which is their main business, should reduce themselves with this question, What does this concern the Lord Jesus Christ? What tendency has it to bring us to him, and to keep us walking in him? *For we preach not ourselves, but Christ*.

**3.** With what liberty he preached.

**(1.)** Divine grace gave him a liberty of spirit. He preached *with all confidence*, as one that was himself well assured of the truth of what he preached — that it was what he durst stand by; and of the worth of it —

that it was what he durst suffer for. He was *not ashamed of the gospel of Christ*.

**(2.)** Divine Providence gave him a liberty of speech: *No man forbidding him*, giving him any check for what he did or laying any restraint upon him. The Jews that used to forbid him to speak to the Gentiles had no authority here; and the Roman government as yet took no cognizance of the profession of Christianity as a crime. Herein we must acknowledge the hand of God,

**[1.]** Setting bounds to the rage of persecutors; where he does not turn the heart, yet he can tie the hand and bridle the tongue. Nero was a bloody man, and there were many, both Jews and Gentiles, in Rome, that hated Christianity; and yet so it was, unaccountably, that Paul though a prisoner was connived at in preaching the gospel, and it was not construed a breach of the peace. Thus God makes *the wrath of men to praise him, and restrains the remainder of it*, <sup><3960></sup>Psalm 76:10. Though there were so many that had it in their power to forbid Paul's preaching (even the common soldier that kept him might have done it), yet God so ordered it, *that no man did forbid him*.

**[2.]** See God here providing comfort for the relief of the persecuted. Though it was a very low and narrow sphere of opportunity that Paul was here placed in, compared with what he had been in, yet, such as it was, he was not molested nor disturbed in it. Though it was not a wide door that was opened to him, yet it was kept open, and no man was suffered to shut it; and it was to many an effectual door, so that there were saints even in Caesar's household, <sup><3902></sup>Philippians 4:22. When the city of our solemnities is thus made a quiet habitation at any time, and we are fed from day to day with the bread of life, no man forbidding us, we must give thanks to God for it and prepare for changes, still longing for that holy mountain in which there shall never be any pricking brier nor grieving thorn.