

Commander and that's why he sent 200 spearmen and 40 men on horses with Paul to get him to Caesarea in the middle of the night. He did get him there. He turned him over to the Roman governor who at that time was Festus, I'm sorry Felix, turned him over to Felix at Caesarea in the middle of the night and Felix called for the elders and the high priest from Jerusalem to come and in a few days they came and he held kind of a little court and let them accuse Paul and so they accused him before Felix. Felix couldn't see anything from anything they said that justified him holding Paul but to please the Jews he continued to hold him and he kept him in prison for two years.

About that time Festus came into office as the governor and he turned the whole matter over to Festus. Festus wondered what this was all about and let Paul come before him and he was really ready to release Paul. He knew of this oath that some Jews had taken, it came to him, and because of that and even Agrippa, Herod Agrippa heard Paul's defense. They both agreed that this man could be let go if he had not done one thing, appealed to Caesar. And the reason Paul did that was because he knew about the threat that there was upon his life and Festus was willing to let Paul go back into the hands of the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem where there was this vow to kill him.

Festus was willing for that to happen and so Paul reached out to a straw you might say and he invoked his Roman citizenship and appealed to Caesar. But King Agrippa and Festus could find nothing worthy in him for death and so even though he had appealed to Caesar he was kept in prison and their determination was they would send him to Caesar.

So I'm going to take you to the book of Acts, to chapter 26. I want you to see this amazing statement from Paul, this ringing declaration that comes after that examination before Agrippa and Festus. Acts 26 verse 22. *"Therefore having obtained help from God, to this day I stand witnessing both the small and great saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come. That the Christ,"* that would be Messiah in the Old Testament, *"that the Christ would suffer, that he would be the first to rise from the dead and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."* That's what Paul was determined to proclaim.

Well Festus found no reason to hold him, Agrippa found no reason to hold him, but he had appealed to Caesar and to Caesar he was sent. But he was protected by God through months and months of travel on the sea, hazardous travel that ended really, didn't end but was punctuated I should say, by a terrible shipwreck where 276 souls were delivered by God safely to an island. Paul was snake bit but didn't die. Marvelous miracles that God worked to bring this man through all that he suffered in that sea travel. Finally they departed from the island of Malta, headed for the coast of Italy and they went up the coast of Italy toward Rome.

And for that I'd like you to turn over to Acts 28 at verse 11. 28 verse 11, let me read just a few verses here. *"After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship,"* now Alexandria was a main city on the northern coast of Africa, a city of Egypt, *"whose figurehead was the twin brothers."* Now the twin brothers refers back to the supposed twins of Zeus, you know the god that the Romans had for their chief god, Castor and Pollux, the two sons, the twin sons of Zeus. So they made figureheads for their ships and each ship was kind of designated by that figurehead. They could see that figurehead out on the sea and they would know what ship it was. We typically paint

names of ships on them and know them by their names and they in a way did it through these figureheads.

So they were on a ship whose figurehead was the twin brothers which had wintered at the island, that's on Malta. *"And landing at Syracuse we stayed three days. From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew and the next day we came to,"* I know how to say this, Puteoli, where we found brethren and were invited to stay with them seven days and so we went toward Rome. And from there when the brethren heard about us they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum, and three inns. When Paul saw them he thanked God and took courage."

We'll look at that 14th verse, *"Where we found brethren and were invited to stay with them seven days."* In the scripture that's called hospitality. We're called upon as Christians to be hospitable. And this may not happen much in the course of our regular lives but there are times when Saints come and go.

I thought it was always a good practice, the First Baptist Church of Lockport invested in a mobile home setup. They had to use it years ago when they were in the building process but they decided to use it for something very special when they need it no longer for classes. And they devoted one of the two units to a missionary room they call it. And what it is is a place for missionaries to come and stay if they're on their way through the area or coming to speak or a speaker should come. They can stay there and without cost and it's a full mobile home. It has a kitchen and bedroom and you know and living room and so forth. Has a dishwasher and all the niceties there. I think even a washer and dryer. I'm not sure about that but I think so. But it's just a nice commodious place to invite people to come.

It kind of shadows back to that little room that the widow of Zarephath provided for Elijah and Elisha. You know they both had a room provided by a widow and those in cases where people through the centuries have provided those very often they call them the prophet's room. You know the prophets from remembering Elijah and Elisha. There's a room for the prophet. But hospitality is one thing that we're called upon. You might read that in Romans chapter 12. You'll see that the Lord wants us to be hospitable but there's more reason than just the physical side of housing and maybe even feeding. It's a matter of taking people in of one spirit, of one heart. There's such a difference being in the world, in the commercial world, in the hostile world around us and being with the saints and having our souls refreshed. And so they went on their way to Rome.

And in verse 15 we see this wonderful response among brethren. A response to Paul and as you think about it why did they gather from so far the suburbs around Rome? Why did they gather in to see and encourage the Apostle Paul? Because they came together really as a family member. They looked on Paul as a brother. It's like having a family reunion. When my family on the Rains side has their reunions, the other side as far as I know have never had a reunion, but the Rains people like to get together every couple years and they have a reunion. When I go to those they're truthfully, there are relatives there. I don't know. I don't know if you have been to a family reunion where you've seen 50, 60, 70, 80 relatives come together. But do you know them all? I mean do you know every last one? I don't. And it's kind of encouraging that go around the circle and say well you know this is your great aunt's cousin's second brother you know or stepbrother or something. And by the time they

tell you the lineage to get to the person you've forgotten it. You can't remember how in the world I'm connected with this person but somehow I'm connected to this person. And then I learn a little bit about them and find them to be open to listening to me. To let me tell them about me. And family reunions are wonderful because you know you have a bloodline connection.

But when Christians come together our bloodline connection is the blood of Christ. We're in the family through the blood of Christ. We're all of one blood. It's a spiritual union. It's far more vital than a family down here. As wonderful as our family connections are and those reunions are, it really should be more pleasant, more delightful to come to church and to be among brothers and sisters in Christ. Who really you enjoy a spiritual oneness with and an enjoyment with that frankly you don't even have with all your family members unless they're saved. And I have some real scoundrels in my family I'll tell you. I could talk about them but some of them I'm not proud of at all. You know took a picture of them you'd have certain lines going down there their beings to block the full view of them. Iron lines.

So these people responded to Paul as a family member. They came together that reunion. That was a showing of love. It was a sense of being united you know when they come together with somebody like that. One heart, one mind. What a union. What a great time. And Paul's response, look at this, he thanked God and took courage. Do you ever thank God for the brothers and sisters of church? Do you ever thank God for those that he has put in your life to bless you and encourage you? You should really sense, I'm not sure that this is true in every church, I know it isn't, that you can go into many churches and not sense the love of God from very many, maybe not from any. I would think that would be terrible but I would hope at Fellowship Bible Church you would sense it from everyone. Be encouraged in it and give praise to God for that love, for what you have together. Give thanks to God. And he took courage.

Now that's an interesting thing to say about the great Apostle Paul. In what sense did Paul need to take courage? We're talking about the man that God used to be at the spear point to reach the Gentile world. The man that God used as his number one outreach to the world. And he needed to be encouraged. He needed to take courage. He took courage. In what sense? Well, what did it show him for those people to come together like that? It showed him that God is supreme, that God is in control, that God's plans will not be prevented, they will come to pass, that God is at work. God's love and care is shown through those believers. The love of God working in their hearts, providing, encouraging through them. And then of course I think that shows that God's presence is there in them.

It's a reassuring of God's presence. When you come together with other believers and they give testimony that God is in them and working in them, you know that you're in the presence of the Lord and that you know he's in you. You recognize that he's in them. God is giving a witness through group fellowship that he is present. And a lot of people say, "Well, I can worship God at home. I watch the program on television and you know I have my own little church and blah blah blah." You don't have any fellowship. You don't have any encouragement from the brethren. You can't link life with life. There's no sharing of love. There's no involvement with other people. I grant you, you can have your meditation time alone and you can study the Word of God alone and you can worship God alone, but there also is a great value in coming

together with the saints. You need the encouragement of seeing other people who are alive in Christ. They need it also from you. It's a two-way street.

So Paul came to Rome and he was guarded by only one soldier. All the other prisoners that were on that ship were taken away to jail, but the centurion left just one soldier to stay with Paul during that period. Didn't worry about Paul at all. And when he got there, he called the Jews together. It was often Paul's approach, you know, to go to the Jew first. And so he called the Jews together from the city of Rome and when he had called them together, he laid his defense before them and as they heard his defense, they had not received any word from anyone. Nobody had told them about his case and so they were interested, but they also were aware that he was now aligned with what was called the way or the way of faith in Christ Jesus. That's the full statement, the way of faith in Christ Jesus. And so they appointed a day and they said, "Paul, we would like to meet with you at a certain day if you would and we'd like you to tell us about this way." And so they set a day and Paul went to them and was with them. Actually, they came to his housing where he was and they set a day and they came together and Paul talked with them, the scripture says, from morning till night. He wasn't gonna miss this opportunity. I mean, Paul took advantage of his opportunities when he had it.

And so, I mean, if he were here, he might preach three or four hours and you probably would appreciate it. But I know you don't appreciate it when I try that, but you would with the Apostle Paul, I assure you. But anyway, he took advantage. He preached from morning till night using the scriptures, the Old Testament scriptures, that he didn't use any New Testament references except the witness of Christ to him personally and to others that he could then quote quite confidently and of the personal work of God in his life and how he had revealed himself to him as the living Christ, that he was not dead, that he, according to the scriptures, was raised from the dead. He reasoned with him all day, all the way till the night, and at the end, it, I'm gonna take it to chapter 28, verse 23 for this, it says, "*So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the law of Moses and the prophets.*" That's, by the way, how they referred to the Old Testament. That's one of the ways. Another way was the law, the Psalms, and the prophets, or the law and poetry and the prophets, okay? Poetry generally including Proverbs and other things like Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, you know, those things. But commonly, the law and the prophets, that would be the way to refer to the Old Testament.

So he reasoned from the law and the prophets from morning till evening. Well, there was a split among the Jews. Look at verse 24, "*And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken and some disbelieved.*" There you have a split. And the Jews are very demonstrative in their stand on things, and that split was very sharp, apparently. And so, Paul could see that split, and in verse 25, he ends that time with them, "*So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word.*" Now, one word means one final statement, not a single word, but a whole, a single final statement. And that was, "*The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying,*" and then he gives this quote from the book of Isaiah, chapter 6 verses 9 and 10, and here's what he says.

He's quoting Isaiah now, *"Go to this people," that's the Jews, "and say, 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive, for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn so that I should heal them.'"*

By the way, just as an aside, I want you to look at that quote from Isaiah and realize that God is saying that the responsibility for belief is on man. This does not teach that God is responsible for whether your heart is stirred enough to believe and receive Christ. It lays the responsibility right back on man, and the Jews had closed their hearts. In that sense, their hearing was dull. They didn't want to hear, and they wouldn't hear. They wouldn't respond. That's what dull hearing is. It doesn't mean the sound is not reaching you. There's no response, and the response God was looking for was from the heart, and so the healing couldn't come. And what's the healing? It's the spiritual healing. It's a spiritual rebirth. God couldn't cleanse them from their sin and give them life, life eternal. That's what healing they needed.

*"And therefore, let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it."* Yes, if you don't want it, the Jews will hear it. The Gentiles will hear it, I should say. You know that great dispute that the Jews had in that time with Paul is still going on today. They still have closed their hearts. They still are dull of hearing. They still don't want to hear the message of salvation. They're still closed to it. I know there are individuals, praise God, that are getting saved among the Jews, but believe me, they're just one here and one there and one here. They're not coming in great numbers. I truly know from the Scriptures they will not come in great numbers until we're gone and the tribulational days are here and the world is going through the throes of persecution and hurt and murders like it has never seen before. That time there will be a harvest among the Jews, and even then it's still only going to be a remnant. They're hard-hearted people, but the Gentiles will hear it. That's what Paul said.

So they departed. Jews departed, had a great dispute among themselves. They're still doing it today. You know, Paul had sent a letter to the believers at Rome years before this. You have to keep that in your mind as you read these things in the book of Acts. That he had sent a letter, we call it the book of Romans. He sent it to Rome to the believers. He had not been there yet. He had hoped to go there. We believe it was sent probably from Corinth when he was ministering at Corinth. If you remember, he was there for 18 months ministering, and you know the horrible state that church was in as you read 1st Corinthians. Despite all the wonderful teaching of the Apostle Paul for a year and a half, they still managed to get into deep, deep doctrinal difficulties and spiritual pride, and didn't take them hardly any time at all to get away from the Word of God and away from the guidance of the Spirit of God and into their flesh. But he had written a letter to Rome, and that letter that he wrote was about the way of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and he had sent it to them because he didn't know just when it was that he would be able to get there. And the book of Romans is a most marvelous book. It is the most complete exposition in the New Testament of the central truths of Christianity, the book of Romans.

But there is one verse in the first chapter of Romans that tells me the passion of the Apostle Paul. I turn you to it, Romans 1:16. *"For I'm not ashamed of the gospel of*

*Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* " Now, Greek there means "the Gentile". It's not just for Jews, it's for the whole world. Jesus didn't die just for Jews, he died for every man in the world. And the passion of the Apostle Paul is here, "*I'm not ashamed, I'm not ashamed.*" It didn't matter, and he said this when he was free, he said this when he wrote this letter, but he proved it through those years of mistreatment, of imprisonment, of disgrace, and we think ultimately of death, martyrdom.

The Bible doesn't record his death for us, but it takes us right up to the imprisonment at Rome that I recited for you, but we think from the early fathers that wrote and passed on information about those days that Paul was killed at Rome because of his faith. And by the way, if you wonder how, I would like to remind you that when Paul was imprisoned in Rome, it was during the days of Nero. Nero was a maniacal Caesar. He was, in a word, crazy. He was the one, read Fox's Book of Martyrs, he was the one that took Christians and dipped them in oil and hung them along the wall of his courtyard and invited guests for a dinner party, and when his guests were assembled, he had the Christians lit with fire so that they burned to give illumination to his dinner party, and they could enjoy the meal with the screams of the Christians. That's how twisted the man was. God preserved Paul for years through all of that, that the gospel might go out, but eventually he was slain too.

I just want to ask you at the end here, you look at the 16th verse, would your love for Christ, would your hope in your salvation, would your faith give you the boldness to endure a mob coming against you trying to kill you and pull you to pieces? Would you have the faithfulness that Paul had as a witness against high officials, high priests, elders of Israel, commander of the army, and also many, many centurions, but commander, and then ultimately the governor? Then you think of those along the way that he witnessed too, and then eventually to Caesar's household itself? Would you have boldness? Would you have be faithful to witness? How about your faith? Would you have that same determination when life around you is crashing to hold on to your faith, trusting the Lord Jesus? Would you draw from God encouragement, comfort during some long imprisonment?

I'm telling you there are a lot of men and women in prison today that know the Lord Jesus, that are hanging on, trusting in Him. I get a call every month or two, I get a call from a brother who's in prison in Missouri. He was here among us many years ago, and I always ask him, "How are you doing in your walk? How is it? Are you reading the Scriptures?" And he is. He's trusting in the Lord as he goes through those years. By the way, Melvin has, he's told me that as far as he knows, he will be in prison for the rest of his life. But he says, "I'm going to trust the Lord to the end." I don't say he's innocent. I don't say he doesn't deserve to be in prison. I would not. I know otherwise. But I do thank God that he loves the Lord and that he's looking to Him for what he needs to go through his daily life.

The Apostle Paul did that. Would you say that you have confidence in the Lord Jesus' return in your faith? Do you have assurance of His victory over sin, of His victory over the world and over the devil? Do you look for His glorious return to the world, to the earth, to set up His kingdom after the tribulation? Do you look to that glorious return for His reign for a thousand years? Do you look to heaven forever? Or is your faith weak? Do you need strength? I have to say, even with the Apostle Paul, I need

strength daily. I don't think that you can get a store of strength that's going to last you, you know, without resupply. I think you need resupply over and over and over and over again. I think our faith is a living faith, a walking faith, the day-by-day and hour-by-hour faith. And we need to be looking to the Lord today.

This man's life teaches us that. What he had to go through teaches us. I mean, he's the greatest man in the advancement of the gospel across the earth that we have. But his life teaches us that we need to look to the Lord constantly. Yes, he was bold. Yes, he's such an example. But he constantly, he needed encouragement. He needed people's fellowship. He needed their prayers. He asked for prayers over and over again. If the Apostle Paul needed prayer, if the Apostle Paul needed strength and encouragement, believe me, we do. Amen? Okay, got an amen out of you. That's something.

*All right, let's pray. Father, thank you for the Apostle Paul's faithfulness. I know we'll be with him soon. We'll see him and talk with him and rejoice because what he has and his salvation is what we have. The victory of our Savior, the Lord Jesus, the cleansing of his blood, the life that he imparts. Thank you, Lord. We are a family. We do have one spirit, one life, one Father, one Lord, one salvation. We are one in you. Help us, Lord, to trust you every day, every hour, every minute, no matter how hard things get, and give you praise and glory through it all. In Jesus' name, amen.*