

The Faithfulness of God through Trials
Acts 27-28

Romans 8:18-39

1 Peter 4

Responsive Psalm 62

This morning we are continuing our journey through the end of Acts, I want to go ahead and start out this morning by reading chapter 27, (read 27) In the last few chapters we have seen that Paul has been arrested, and again for a second time, only this time it is the Jewish Elders themselves had set forth a plot to lie in wait and ambush Paul. Having now a new Governor they believed that they could convince him to bring Paul back to Jerusalem to stand trial. Paul recognizing the danger in this, and having the knowledge from God knowing that he would be before Caesar, invoked that he should be brought to Caesar for trial. All the Roman rulers up until this point have found no fault in Paul, none which resulted in the breaking of the Roman law and deserving of death as the Jews were seeking. A few weeks ago, we talked about how both of these governors unwillingness to free Paul though they found no fault in him likely worked in Pauls advantage. It had offered him protection against those who were seeking his life.

It is likely that no matter where Paul would have sought to go, men would have been sent to eliminate him. There was at this time now safer place for Paul then to be held under Roman guard. Being a Roman citizen, who they could not find any fault worthy of the death the Jews sought, he was kept chained to a guard but under house arrest. He will able to receive in visitors, and his friends and family were able to provide for his needs. God was gracious to Paul in his imprisonment, being afforded such luxury was not common among prisoners. Roman prisons were not intended to keep prisoners for very long periods of time, they were a holding place mainly for those waiting a death sentence. They were underground, filthy, hot, miserable places with little to no light and ventilation. There was no individual cells, prisoners were kept in a room, chained together both male and female together, often full and overcrowded. This became one of the ministries of the church, for little to nothing was provided for those who were held in prison, and the church would bring them food and care.

Paul was spared this humility and suffering, being held under house arrest being chained to a guard 24/7, was able to have visitors come and go unhindered. It is during this time a large portion of the new testament was written, for much of what we have in scripture today is the letters that Paul wrote to the churches that he had established and ministered to on his journeys. There is also evidences in these letters that even some of the Roman guards had come to believe through Paul's witness though being in chains. This stands as an example to us, that the reality is no matter our circumstances we are, and should be a witness to Christ. Our very lives as ones to be lived in service to our saviour, that means through trials, through times of peace and prosperity, through imprisonment, through sickness, no matter what circumstance we find ourselves in we praise God. For we are his children, who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, no matter our circumstance that reality will never change, and it is that reality alone that is worthy of all worship and praise. James said, count it all joy when you face various trials, because through such brings a growth of faith and a further reliance upon our savior. There are some who read this and understand it as we should be putting on a smile, and laughing, through all things, I don't think that is the point here. We can endure, in faith, because we know that our suffering is only for a time, and that we are being held in the hands of the almighty God.

There is no outcome that has not been purposed and planned by our heavenly father. And through all things we can rest in him knowing that he knows what is best. It is not that we are to be feeling or experiencing joy when hardships and trials arise, but it is rather a reflection upon the peace that comes knowing that we do not suffer such alone, that we have Jesus Christ who suffered the same afflictions, and more who is making intercession for us, pleading our case before the father who loves and cares for his children. Therefore, we can have hope in this dark world, through this life no matter what befalls us, for in the end we are Christ's and he is ours and there is nothing that can separate us from him. "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is Christ Jesus our Lord."

I think that this is very much Luke's intention in writing these accounts about Paul, he very well could have focused on the ministry of others and how the gospel had continued to spread across the world but instead he decided to focus on Paul through his trials and imprisonment, and even his perilous journey to Rome which we will read about here this morning. Each step of the way God is guiding, encouraging, and helping Paul, God is just as intrinsically involved in the lives of his people as he is in the corporate collection of his holy nation. Last year I heard a pretty awful sermon about God and his dealings with mankind, implying that God doesn't really know what is going on down here unless he sort of zooms in to see. Sorta like he is out there looking at earth watching it generally as a whole, but once in a while looks in his telescope to check up on individuals. No, that is not our God, that is not the God of scripture. This God is intrinsically, completely, and utterly involved in the personal lives of each and every one of his children.

He is not limited in breadth nor scope of his capabilities, or willingness to be there with us at all times, and through all things. This does not mean we won't deal with hardships, or even at times feel separated from God, but the reality is that we are never truly separated, it is more about us, and our lack of faith and understanding then it is about God's faithfulness and presence. That is the significance in these biblical accounts that we see such as these last chapters about Paul. Throughout it all we see God weaving his purpose and his will through the trials and difficulties that Paul must face. And each of these things are a real and true anxiety ridden experience, can you imagine being brought up before our governor and legislature to give an account of defense such as Paul did? Of course there would be some anxiety and anxiousness in doing so, God doesn't often take away the experience whatever it may be, nor does he make us numb to it, but upon focusing on him, in prayer, and having our hearts pointed toward worship of him, we can face such things boldly in faith knowing the outcome are secure in God's will.

This morning, I want to finish up this book and continue this story of Paul's journey to Rome by reading chapter 28, in which we will see God working miraculous things through Paul, as a testimony that this God, is the true God. (read 28) The reason why I wanted to lump these two chapters together this morning is that they both deal with exactly what we are talking about this morning, the faithfulness of God through trials. In each and every step of the way God is with them as they journey to Rome, but it seems that there are trials, and issues in each and every step of the way. There is this idea in our modern churches, that God's way is the easy way, follow God's will for your life and things will go smoothly....has that been the case for Paul? We know that Paul is following within the will of God, for we have seen it explicitly stated, God himself telling Paul that he will be brought to Rome,

Verse 11 of chapter 23 after Paul's arrest, it says, "The Lord stood by him and said, "be of good cheer Paul, for as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness of me in Rome. " This was not a promise of an easy path, but rather that it is going to be a rough one, but be of good cheer, take heart and know that my will, will be done. Following God does not mean we will not have trials, or that we will be free from tribulation, in fact the bible speaks of the opposite, Christ says, they hated me, therefore they will hate you also, and also Paul quoting Psalms says that we face death all day long, and are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. Not exactly the most encouraging, uplifting message is it, but we have hope in the one who has conquered death, Oh death, where is your sting, Oh grave, where is your victory, both have been conquered by Jesus Christ on our behalf so that though even through the same we have hope, knowing that to be absent from this body is to be present with the Lord, and that there is nothing that can separate us from his love.

In these last 2 chapters we get this sort of rapid fire recounting of Paul's journey to Rome, and in it are multiple accounts where he could have died, storm at sea, shipwrecked, the guards threatening to kill all the prisoners because if they had escaped, the punishment for the Roman guard was death, so there was a temptation to kill the prisoners after the shipwreck in fears that they may attempt an escape. But the Centurion who guarded Paul wanting to protect Paul from such a fate did not allow such a practice to take place. Now they are shipwrecked on the shores of Malta, and Paul is bitten by a viper, which again should have been his death, but again God protects Paul. Each step of the way there is peril, trials, and hardships, but God was faithful through it all delivering Paul to Rome, and even upon his arrival at Rome it says that Paul was permitted to dwell under house arrest with the soldier who guarded him. Again being aloud visitors, and kept in the relative safety of the Roman guard in a hospitable environment instead of the disease ridden, dark prisons.

God has a purpose for your life, if you are looking for reason, for purpose, for meaning the truth is that it can only truly be found within Christ. And for all intents and purposes, you are immortal as long as God has a purpose for you. Paul's purpose was to go to Rome, to be a witness to the gentiles in basically the capitol of the known world at the time, every threat he faced, even being bit by a poisonous viper had no effect or threat on the life of Paul for God still had a purpose and a plan for him. That is kind of a sobering thought is it not? That we are alive today, not by chance, not by our own merit, or by some happen stance of fate, but because God still has a use for us. He still has a plan, for each and every one of us that must be fulfilled before our time on earth is complete. God not only knows the time, and the mode of our death, but he has pre-ordained it to be, and we are essentially invisible until that time. It creates this weird dichotomy in our understanding again bringing up the issues of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. You do something stupid, there will of course be consequences, yet it isn't as though God was not aware of it, nor will it even interfere with his purpose and plan in your life.

Yes, sometimes we suffer because of our own stupidity, because of our own lack of faith, because of our own sinfulness. But likewise God uses such moments like any good father would, as teachable moments, as moments showing us to see the emptiness of life without him, and truly how lost we would be without him. None of us are good, none of us are righteous, none of us are holy outside of God's gracious gift given to us. We fail, we sin, sometimes we suffer the consequences, but through it all God neither leaves us, nor forsakes us and is ready and faithful to forgive if we turn and repent. Paul did not miss a beat, nor change who he was throughout all of this. Each moment, each trial, each thing that was placed before him was a missionary opportunity. He gave account of his faith, and shared the gospel of Jesus Christ in the highest courts, and to the lowest soldier, and civilian.

God had placed him right where he was to be, right where God needed him to be for a time. And as I had mentioned a few weeks back, it is during this time of imprisonment that Paul wrote much of the epistles that we have still yet today. The arrest, and imprisonment of Paul now having been brought to Rome, afforded him the protection he needed against the Jews who were plotting his demise, and also the opportunity to write letters to the various churches he had visited and helped establish on his previous journeys. God is infinitely wiser than we are, placing Paul in what from the human perspective would be an awful situation, but it is there that he wrote these letters which is still effecting the hearts and minds of people for generations upon generations. The reach, and scope of Paul's ministry far outdoes any human perspective, or expectation. And even Paul was given as an example to us, of a faithful ministry, of resting in God, of facing trials and tribulations in trust and hope. And as an account of God's grace and mercy toward his children, throughout Paul's life accounted in this book of Acts, we see the golden thread of God's guidance, how, by using the selfish desires and hatred of others toward him, it had driven Paul to be exactly where God wanted him.

So really, the take away this morning in these last two chapters, in fact, from this entire book is God's absolute sovereignty within the lives of his children. That there is no ifs, or maybes where God is concerned and that he is actively, and lovingly guiding us through the story he has written for us. Throughout this life we find ourselves in a myriad of different situations, both times of relative peace, and others a time of suffering, or trial. But in all situations God is not only with us, he has ordained such for his purpose and plan in our lives, driving us ever forward to be more and more the people we ought to be. There is no evidence that we as God's children will not have difficulties in this life, some the ramifications of our own decisions, and others seemingly random, but even all those things, God knew beforehand and has provided the grace that we may endure.

That I think is one of the major lessons of the book of Acts, that no matter what is happening around you, trust God, lean on him, come to him in prayer, and the one who is the author and finisher of our salvation will see you through.