

“Israel’s Hope”
(Acts 26:6-8)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we saw Paul’s arraignment before King Agrippa, Bernice, Festus and the leading Roman officials at Caesarea.
 - a. Festus was obliged to send Paul to Rome because of his appeal, but he didn’t know what charges to send with him.
 - b. And so he took advantage of Agrippa’s visit, since, being a Jew, he would be more likely to know why the Jews wanted to kill him.
 - c. Agrippa took advantage of this visit to learn more about the Gospel, which he undoubtedly had been hearing about for some time.
 - d. And Paul took advantage of this opportunity as well: to preach the Gospel.
 - (i) Jesus told him that he would speak before governors and kings, and here was another occasion to do so.
 - (ii) The interesting thing about Paul’s defense, in God’s providence, was that his plea of innocence was nothing less than his personal testimony of how the Gospel transformed his life.
 - (iii) The Lord told Paul that he would be persecuted in His service, but even in persecution the doors were opened for him to preach the Gospel, and that’s what he did.
 - (iv) Everything he did, he did for the sake of the Gospel, that he might also partake of salvation in Christ (1 Cor. 9:23): this is the kind of life Jesus calls us to.
2. Most importantly, the Lord took advantage of this situation.
 - a. This was a divine appointment with Agrippa.
 - (i) Jesus was sent first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel to preach the Gospel to them.
 - (ii) After His work was complete, He commissioned His twelve to complete the task: they were to go first to Israel, and if they refused to listen, then to the Gentiles.
 - (iii) Agrippa himself was a Jew, one of these lost sheep – the Lord was graciously bringing the Gospel to him.
 - b. At the same time, this was how the Lord was going to take Paul to Rome for his divine appointment there.
 - (i) The Gospel would be preached to the whole world (Roman Empire) before the end could come (Matt. 24:14).
 - (ii) That meant it must also be preached in Rome herself, and so the Lord was sending Paul there.
 - (iii) But first, he must testify before Agrippa.

B. Preview.

1. This morning, we see that testimony continue:
 - a. Last week, Paul began by describing his early life as a Jew.
 - (i) How he spent his youth in Palestine and Jerusalem (v. 4).
 - (ii) How he was zealous for the Law, being a Pharisee in more than name only, but also in his life: as the Jews could testify (v. 5).
 - (iii) His life had not been that of the radical rebel, but of the radical conformist: he was the quintessential Jew.
 - b. As a matter of fact, he still was – nothing had changed.
 - (i) He had not repudiated the Jewish faith.
 - (ii) Rather, he had begun to understand and embrace it for the first time in his encounter with Christ.
 - (iii) Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God’s promises: He is Israel’s hope. This is what Paul was standing trial for.
 - (iv) Paul was pointing to the irony of the situation – that the Jews were seeking to kill him for the very thing they themselves, in some sense, hoped to obtain.
2. This morning, we’re going to consider two things:
 - a. First, what the hope of the Jews actually was; what it is the Lord had promised to Israel.
 - b. And second, how the Lord fulfilled these promises through Jesus Christ.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, what was Israel’s hope? Clearly, it was the hope that God would send the Messiah to save them.
 1. Israel needed salvation; they needed a deliverer from sin.
 - a. It’s true that many of the Jews believed the Messiah would deliver them mainly from Rome’s tyranny – some day it actually will put an end to all tyranny.
 - b. But it wouldn’t be in the way they supposed (revolution), but by overcoming sin.
 - (i) Sin entered the world through Adam’s decision to disobey God, and physical and eternal death entered through sin (Rom. 5:12).
 - (ii) Sin was at the root of all their problems (and ours).
 2. This is what God promised He would overcome through the Messiah.
 - a. God began to speak of the Messiah as early as the Fall of Adam and Eve, when they first needed to hear it, to bring them hope. His promise was implied in the curse He pronounced on the serpent: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel” (Gen. 3:15).
 - b. It was expanded through the promise the Lord made to Abraham.
 - (i) God called Abraham to leave his country, his relatives and his father’s house and go to a land He would give him.
 - (ii) The Lord said to him, “I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen. 12:2-3).

- (iii) And then when the Lord asked Abraham to sacrifice his son, and he was willing even to do this, the Lord said to him, “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice” (22:18).
 - c. God’s promise was further revealed through the ceremonial law given through Moses.
 - (i) Moses pointed to Him as the great Prophet who would declare to us God’s will.
 - (ii) The animal sacrifices pointed to the sacrifice Messiah would make to put away sin.
 - (iii) The priesthood pointed to His office as the Great High Priest and the offering He would make.
 - (iv) Even the Temple pointed to Him - His body that would be torn down/killed and raised up again.
 - d. The lineage and royal office of the Messiah was revealed through the promise given to David: “When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sam. 7:12-13).
 - e. And the effects of His work on the hearts of His people were expanded through the promise of the New Covenant given through Jeremiah the prophet: “‘Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jer. 31:31-34).
 - f. These were the promises God made; *this was Israel’s hope*.
- B. Second, we need to see that though it is true that the vast majority of the Jews rejected Him, Jesus was and remains Israel’s only hope.
- 1. He is the fulfillment of all of God’s promises.
 - a. He is the seed of the woman that crushed the serpent’s head.
 - (i) On the cross, He dealt a moral blow to Satan.
 - (ii) And in the process, He laid down His life.
 - b. He is the seed promised to Abraham through whom all the nations of the earth have been and will be blessed through the free offer of the Gospel.
 - (i) Everyone who turns to Him receives forgiveness of sins and everlasting life.
 - (ii) There can be no greater blessings than these.

- c. He is the Great Prophet who has declared God's will to us; the Lamb of God sacrificed to put away sin; the Great High Priest who offered Himself as a sacrifice to God to atone for sins; the Temple that was torn down only to be raised again in three days.
 - d. He is the Son of David whose kingdom has been established forever.
 - (i) He was born in David's line and so heir to the throne.
 - (ii) And when He was raised from the dead, He was lifted up into heaven and seated on a throne, having been given all authority in heaven and earth to save those who believe.
 - e. He is the One who through His work is able to effect the new birth through His Spirit, giving all His people a love for God and obedience.
 - f. Jesus is Israel's hope.
 - (i) Paul had embraced and received Him.
 - (ii) He was hoping and praying that Israel would do the same.
 - (iii) But sadly, this is why the Jews wanted to kill him.
2. In closing, let's first note two things, then apply this in two ways:
- a. The first thing to note is that Jesus actually did what God intended Him to do in fulfilling these promises.
 - (i) It is commonly taught in churches today that if Israel had received Jesus, then He would immediately have become their King, been overthrown by the Romans and crucified, raised again from the dead, brought the tribulation as judgment on the world, judged the nations, then reigned from an earthly Jerusalem or a heavenly one for one thousand years.
 - (ii) But none of this can be true:
 - (a) Jesus did not come to set up a geopolitical kingdom in Israel for a thousand years.
 - (b) He came to bring a spiritual kingdom that would last forever, beginning on this earth and culminating in the new heavens and new earth.
 - (c) Jesus did what He came to do and nothing more, and in doing these things, He became Israel's hope.
 - (iii) This is further proven by our Scripture reading this morning in Romans 11:
 - (a) Paul writes, "What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened" (Rom. 11:7).
 - (b) Whatever it was Israel was seeking, *some actually received it; it is not true that none of them did!*
 - (c) And those who received Him did not receive an earthly kingdom with temporal blessings, but a heavenly kingdom with eternal blessings.
 - (d) They received Christ, and in Him, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.
 - (e) This was Israel's hope.
 - b. The second thing to note is that the Jews who were seeking after this hope really weren't seeking it at all.

- (i) God gave them promises, and they had a hope that they would receive them, but they weren't really seeking God in the right way (by faith), nor for the right things (heavenly blessings): They were seeking earthly blessings through their works.
 - (ii) If they had truly been seeking God, they would have received Christ when He came, even as did Mary, Elizabeth, Anna, Simeon and the rest Paul speaks of in Romans 11.
 - (iii) They were seeking something, but it wasn't the reality.
 - (iv) Perhaps this is why the former group mentioned is confused on this issue.
- c. The first application is make sure you are seeking more than what these Jews were seeking.
- (i) There are many who go to church, many who profess Christ, many who worship Him from Lord's Day to Lord's Day, who are after nothing more than the Jews.
 - (ii) They really don't want Christ, or holiness, or obedience, or to fellowship with God.
 - (iii) What they really want is deliverance from hell as the Jews wanted deliverance from their enemies.
 - (iv) Do you really want to leave this world and go to heaven?
 - (v) Do you want to do so because the Father and Son are there, and because the Spirit fills that holy place with His presence? Or are you just afraid of hell?
 - (vi) You must have more than a fear of punishment, you must love God, or you have nothing more than the Jews
 - (vii) If you have nothing more, come to Christ this morning for His salvation. He is your only hope.
- d. The second application addresses another group entirely: those who don't believe that Christianity is true at all.
- (i) Paul exclaims in verse 8, "Why is it considered incredible among you *people* if God does raise the dead?"
 - (ii) This was probably meant for Paul's Gentile audience, since the Jews, excepting the Sadducees, accepted the resurrection.
 - (iii) It could be that he heard some murmuring among them regarding the resurrection as he did at Mars Hill where they scoffed at it.
 - (iv) The Gospel is a stumbling block to the Jews, but foolishness to the Gentiles (1 Cor. 1:23).
 - (v) Is it foolish to you? Do you think someone made it up, that it's a false hope for the weak minded?
 - (vi) If so, you need to repent and turn to Christ. He is your only hope of escaping everlasting damnation. The Gospel alone is the power of God to salvation to those who *believe* (Rom. 1:16).
 - (vii) Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and if you do, Israel's hope will become yours. Amen.