

Week 51 Chronological

December 14: Acts 27 and 28

Paul is handed over to Julius, a centurion from the Imperial Regiment, to sail to Rome. Julius was kind to Paul. When they put into port at Sidon, he allowed Paul to go and visit his friends and receive care from them. They set sail again and reached Myra in Lycia. From there, they found an Alexandrian ship headed for Italy. The travel was rough and sailing was slow. They sailed along the south side of Crete off Salome. The sea continued to be rough, but they did wind up in a place called Fair Havens.

The voyage is dangerous and Paul warns them that they are headed for danger. He sees the threat to both the ship and their lives. However, his advice is not heeded. Instead, they decide to keep moving because the harbor they were in was not suitable to winter over in. They wanted to reach Phoenix, a harbor on Crete, where the ship could safely spend winter.

They set sail and a gentle south wind springs up. This just gives them a false sense of security. Soon, a fierce wind hits them. I have sailed through the Mediterranean more than a few times and I have experienced the same thing. In the morning the water was nice and calm, but then within without any warning, the sea begins to churn and the wind starts battering the ship. Their ship was caught and unable to head into the wind, so she gave way to the wind and was driven off course by it. The storm continues battering the ship, so they begin throwing cargo overboard in hopes of saving the vessel. The storm is so nasty that they do not see the sun or stars for many days. Paul stands up, tells them to have courage, and encourages them to run the ship aground. They continue sailing, but there is concern they will run aground, so they drop four anchors trying to hold the ship steady. The sailors had not eaten for two weeks, so Paul encourages them to eat something. He takes bread, gives thanks to God, breaks it, and begins to eat. At that, the other passengers begin to eat as well.

The next day, the ship hit a sand bar. The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners so that they could not swim and escape. However, the centurion prevented them from doing so because he wanted to save Paul's life. They make it ashore to Malta where they are shown incredible kindness by the people. Paul immediately begins ministering to the people of Malta. He even finds himself in front of Publius, the leader in Malta, and heals him from dysentery. After three months, they set sail again for Rome.

When Paul arrives in Rome, he is first interviewed by the Roman Jews. He witnessed to them about the kingdom of God and tried to persuade them that Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses. Some believed, but others did not. Paul continued ministering from his rented home for two years, proclaiming Christ with boldness.

December 15: Colossians 1-4 and Philemon

The letter to the church in Colossae is another letter Paul wrote from prison. He wrote the letter to correct false teachings that were spreading in the church. Paul begins the letter expressing his

gratitude to God for establishing them in the faith. He also explains that he prays for their continued growth in the LORD, so that they can understand His will.

Paul warns them not to be taken captive by false doctrines or philosophy and empty deceit. Paul refers to this as “human tradition” meaning it is not from God, but from a fallible human being. From what we can tell in the letter, there is some judgment being cast on these believers for not following all the old festivals. Since they have been redeemed by God, they are no longer bound to all the rituals that once were observed. There is nothing wrong with celebrating these festivals or not celebrating these festivals. However, it is wrong to judge the person based on whether they participate or not.

They, and we, have been raised with the Messiah. As a result, we should have our hearts and minds chasing after the things above, not the things of the earth. They should put their old nature away. As humans, we are bent on sin. It is what we do. Adam and Eve lived in a paradise where all their needs were met. They had perfect fellowship with one another and with God Almighty, yet they sinned! Since we are a new creation in Christ, we should seek His will and emulate Him, not continue being trapped in our sin. God freed us from that captivity, why would we keep going back to it?

Paul wraps up the letter encouraging them to devote themselves to prayer. He tells them to give thanks, but also to pray for him so that God may open a door to present the message. Paul is always seeking an opportunity to serve the LORD no matter what circumstance he was in.

Philemon is the only letter from Paul of a private nature. This letter deals with Onesimus, a runaway slave. He had robbed Philemon and escaped to Colossae. He met Paul there and became a believer. Paul sent him back to Philemon with this letter. Paul encourages Philemon to welcome Onesimus back as a brother. If someone wrongs us, but later comes to know Jesus and returns to ask forgiveness, how we will respond?

December 16: Ephesians 1-6

The letter to the Ephesians is an anthem to the sovereign grace God gives sinners through Christ. It is a call for all of us to live lives worthy of the calling we have received and worthy of Christ's sacrifice.

After greeting the church in Ephesus, Paul launches into worship of God. Verse 3 is sometimes referred to as “the doxology” because it expresses what God has done and gives praise, worship, and honor to Him. We have redemption in Christ. That means that we have been purchased with the price of Christ's blood.

The Ephesians are reminded that they were once dead in their sins and trespasses. Paul admits that he also walked according to the flesh and the fact is that we too walked according to the world before we knew Christ. God is rich in mercy, though, and plucked us up out of that pit and made us His own. Paul gives a call to unity. Some are Gentile converts; others are Jewish converts. Regardless of nationality, race, or any of the other devices the world uses to separate

people, we are united under God. We are living in a very divisive world these days. My prayer is that we will unite under the banner of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Paul details how he prays for them. He prays that they are strengthened by the Spirit and that Messiah dwells in their hearts. Paul also prays that they are rooted in love. A healthy prayer life is important in the life of a believer. Prayer is not the least we can do, it is the most we can do because we are asking the God of the universe for help.

The letter calls the people to use their gifts to advance the kingdom of God and promote unity within the ranks. Each believer makes up the universal church. The church building is not the church, the members of the church are. The believers all form one church that is united under one Spirit. So, they should be united and accept one another in love. Paul reminds them that they did not all receive the same gifts. Some were called to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers. Each task is important in growing the kingdom of God. I like to think of it along the lines of the Jenga game. Each wooden block of the tower is important to holding the structure upright. As pieces are removed, the structure becomes weaker, until it collapses. The same can happen to us if we are not careful.

Since God has done this wonderful thing for us, we should be imitators of God. The highest form of flattery is imitation. We were made in the image of God. When we become believers, we enter the sanctification process where we grow more like Him every day. Our goal as Christians is not to conform to the worldly standard, but to conform to God's standard and imitate Him. The world is watching to see if we merely pay lip service to faith or if we actually live it out. Paul warns that the days are evil, so we should not be foolish in our actions. We need to understand God's will. One way to make that happen is to have a consistent prayer life and regular Bible reading.

Paul closes this letter warning the Ephesians (and us) that we are engaged in spiritual warfare. We might not see it, but it is happening all around us. As believers, we should put on the full Armor of God. The truth is like a belt. In Roman armor, the belt was a vital piece of equipment because it steadied the soldier and allowed him to take on the weight of the other armor pieces. We must know the complete objective truth of God. Righteousness is worn like a breastplate and our feet should be ready to spread the gospel. We carry the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit as we go into battle. So which piece is the most important? All of them are. If we are missing one piece, we are more vulnerable to attack.

December 17: Philippians 1-4

Philippians is a very warm and personal letter to the church in Philippi. They had some initial difficulties, but those difficulties created a strong bond between Paul and the converts in Philippi. This makes sense. Some of my strongest friendships were developed while onboard destroyers. The fast pace of life and constant uncertainty of schedule creates a fair amount of anxiety. So, when you are in the same boat as someone dealing with similar difficulties, bonds develop that are incredibly strong.

The letter is written to thank the Philippians for sending him a gift while he was in prison. He also wanted to tell them about his current circumstances. Even though Paul was in jail, he had joy because God's kingdom was growing. He was put in a rough spot, but this allowed him to continue preaching and teaching. He does not shy away from teaching his fellow prisoners or the guards that are assigned to watch him. Paul fearlessly preaches the gospel no matter what circumstance he is in. Do we have that same vigor in sharing our faith?

Paul admits that he is still not fully reached Christian maturity. So, he continues to grow every single day. We will never reach full maturity in the LORD while we are on this earth. However, we should daily strive to become more like Him. Paul is not worried about chasing down the things that the world defines as successful. Instead, he is concerned with obeying God and doing His will. The things of this world will fade. Nothing in this world lasts forever except for your soul, my soul, and God's eternal Word. Are we investing in eternity or something else?

The letter closes with counsel to the church in Philippi. We can apply it to our lives today. Paul encourages them not to worry about anything, but take everything to God in prayer with petitions and thanksgiving. He will give us the peace that surpasses all understanding. We also read one of the most popular Scriptures to use out of context. I see it at many of the sporting events I get to go to. Philippians 4: 13 "I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me." Paul is not guaranteeing that God will give someone a great tennis match or help them overcome a worthy challenger at tennis. Paul is explaining that when we get stuck in rough and unfair situations, God will give us the strength to get through it. God will give us the grit and determination we need to navigate the challenges of this life. As believers, if we have not already faced hard times, hard times will come. God will give us the strength to endure, just as He gave Paul the strength to endure his prison sentence. Not only did Paul endure the sentence, but he had joy while he was going through it. God will do the same for us.

December 18: 1 Timothy 1-6

First and Second Timothy and Titus have been referred to as the "pastoral epistles" since the 18th century. These letters are different from other Pauline epistles because they are directed to Paul's ministry partners.

When Paul went to Macedonia and Timothy remained in Ephesus, he instructed Timothy to not teach a different doctrine or pay attention to myths. If he strays from doctrine, then he could fall into the trap of heresy. If he gives any credence to myths, he could also fall into the heresy trap or lose sight of the Gospel. Paul gives praise that Jesus came to save sinners and refers to himself as the worst of all sinners.

Timothy is urged to give prayers, petitions, intercessions, and thanksgivings for everyone so that they can lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. It is somewhat ironic considering Paul's life as a believer was rather tumultuous. God gave Paul peace and tranquility despite the opposition and death threats he faced in his ministry.

Timothy was relatively young. Paul encourages him to not let anyone despise him because of his youth. Instead, he should be an example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. He reminds

Timothy that he has been given a gift and he needs to keep developing that gift. God gives us natural talents, but it is up to us to make those talents even better. As a pastor, I spend a fair amount of my week listening to other pastors that are much better speakers than I am and reading books about theology written by people a lot smarter than me. I do this because I know I can get better and I want to get better. The best way for me to do that is to observe those that are better than me.

The rich are directed to not put their faith in their wealth and become arrogant. Wealth is uncertain, but God provides us with everything we need. As believers, our hope and trust should be only in Him.

December 19: Titus 1-3

Paul wrote this letter to Titus to give him encouragement in his ministry. Paul left Titus in Crete to continue the ministry they started. Paul gives guidance on how to choose proper elders. He warns Titus against the rebellious people. Crete was known in the ancient world for its moral decadence. The historian Polybius wrote that it is virtually impossible to find personal conduct that was more vile and treacherous than in Crete. This sinfulness was a cause for celebration among the non believing population. Paul directs Titus to stand up against this poor behavior. Just because the world says it is okay, does not make it right in the eyes of the LORD.

The conduct of older men is reviewed. It is proper for them to be level headed, sensible, sound in faith, love, and endurance. If they do not possess these qualities, people should not learn from them or emulate their ways. As believers, we should be working to be more like Jesus, not like the world. We should turn away from godlessness and worldly lusts, seeking God and His righteousness.

Paul closes Titus reminding him that the believers in Crete must still treat the sinful and lost in a loving way. Just because they are stuck in sin does not mean that they should be judgmental toward them. Instead, they should show love to these people and work to get them to come to Christ. He is the only One that can truly change them. All believers at one point in time were lost. We were stuck in sin and could not distinguish the right way to go. But God pulled us up out of that pit. Since we were lost at one point in our lives, we should remember where we came from when it comes to interaction with unbelieving people.

December 20:1 Peter 1-5

First Peter is considered one of the General Epistles. This letter gives encouragement to the suffering believers in Asia Minor. There was intense persecution at the time. This letter encourages faithfulness under extreme oppression. Peter encourages them to be serious and to set their hope completely on God's grace. Since God is holy, they too should be holy. To live godly lives, they need to remove all malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. They do not grow the body and mature us in Jesus. Instead, they are destructive forces.

Our faith in Jesus does not guarantee that we will have an easy life. In fact, it means quite the opposite. The people in Asia Minor are now suffering for their faith. In their suffering, Peter

encourages them to do what is good while they suffer. When they do this, it will bring favor with God. God is glorified when we endure hardships and continue doing what is right. Adversity is not always fun. However, it can help us grow. One of the reason a weightlifter's muscles grow is because he or she gives the muscles adversity. That strain of lifting the weight makes small tears in the muscle. The muscle grows bigger and stronger through this tearing and repairing. The same can be said of our faith. If we are enduring hardship, we know that it will make us stronger on the other side of the hardship.

Peter closes this letter encouraging us to be serious and alert. The enemy is roaming around looking to devour us like a lion. We are called to resist him and be firm in our faith.

December 21: Hebrews 1-6

We do not know who wrote Hebrews. If there is a question-and-answer time after the Judgement Seat of Christ, that is one of the many questions I have. This letter is written as a tribute to the incomparable Son of God and to encourage the persecuted believers. The author begins the letter stating that God spoke to the fathers in the Old Testament through prophets at different times and different ways. We are blessed in the fact that He communicates with us by His Son. Jesus Christ is superior to all. He is not a created being. He was there from the very beginning. He is and always has been.

We are saved through His atoning work on the cross. We should be careful not to drift away from His teachings. Jesus condescended His throne and made Himself lower than the angels so that He could go to the cross and take away our sin. Why would we take that gift for granted and continue living in our sin and iniquity? S

The author warns them against unbelief. As we walk with Christ, we may have some questions. This is not a problem. Sometimes doubts creep up. What we do with those questions will make the difference between strengthening the faith and apostasy. If we search out the answer to these questions, God proves Himself, and our faith is strengthened. However, if we do not address the question and just retain the doubt, then that is the slippery slope to apostasy. We should do everything in our power to grow in our faith, not walk away from it.

The role of the high priest is reviewed. The Jewish high priest had to make a sin offering for himself and the people. Jesus is the high priest. However, He did not have to make sacrifice for Himself because he was sinless and blameless. He had no guilt. Instead, He took on our guilt and gave Himself up as the ultimate sacrifice.

Relationships are like most other things in this world. If we ignore them long enough, they will go away. Paul encourages the readers to refrain from regressing in their faith. We too should do everything we can to grow closer with Him. It takes daily time with Him. I love Dania tremendously and I want our relationship to grow, so I spend time with her every day, even when we are crazy busy. If I only spent time with her for an hour on a Sunday morning, would our relationship grow? Would she feel loved if she only got an hour of my attention out of the 168 hours a week? That is only 0.5 percent of the week! Surely God deserves more of our time than that!