

As we gather together Lord to wait on You, for the work of Your Spirit in our lives, as we have gathered together, Lord, to sing our praises unto Your glorious name, to open our hearts to You and to that work that You wish to do in our lives tonight by Your Holy Spirit. And so Lord, we just commit now ourselves and this service. We ask Your work. Lord, we thank You for the hundreds of our young people from high school that are up at the camp now. And we ask Lord that even this first night, while they are there, that You would begin tonight Your marvelous work in their lives, that You plan to accomplish this week. Let them cast aside the works of darkness. And Lord, let them just be open and hungry after You and the things of righteousness. And so, Lord, bless them abundantly. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Last week we left Paul on a board, being brought in through the heavy surf to the shore. And the passengers on the ship escaping the fierceness of the storm and though the ship was destroyed according to the word of the Lord to Paul, not a person's life was lost.

Now when they had escaped, (When they had escaped safely to land from the ship that was breaking up in the heavy surf.) they then found out that the island was called Malta. So they were driven across the Mediterranean all the way from Crete in this storm, in fourteen days, to the island of Malta, which of course is south of Sicily.

²*And the natives showed us unusual kindness* (In the old King James the word natives is shown as barbarous. This word barbarous is a translation of the Greek word, *barbary*, but it is sort of an unfortunate word in our modern English. The Greeks called everyone who didn't speak Greek, barbaras. And it was just sort of a Greek slang word for anybody who couldn't speak Greek. They believed that Greek was the most beautiful, poetic, flowing, language that existed. So if you couldn't speak Greek, they said well you were a barbar. That is, your sounds were so foreign to them. They just said, barbaras. And so from that came the word, barbarian, which we sort of think as a half clad kind of a wild person. But they were the people who lived on Malta, the natives to Malta. But even the word natives sometimes indicates sort of a primitive people. But like you are natives of California, they were natives of Malta. Not barbarous people at all, but very wonderful and kind people. And Paul said they showed us unusual kindness); *for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold.* It wasn't a pleasant condition. It was still raining. It had been raining in a fierce storm for fourteen days. Now they are cast up on this beach on the island of Malta, still raining and cold. They have had to come through the surf. They are soaking wet. And so the thing is to build a bonfire in order that they might dry off a bit and warm up a bit. And so those that were there, helped them. They started building this fire.

The interesting thing, ³*But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand.* Now Paul was the kind who just couldn't stand around. You're going to build a fire, Paul is out gathering sticks for the fire. He's the kind of fellow that just got in. And though he had this great ministry, yet he wasn't afraid to do some work, to get his hands dirty, so to speak. And he really is a model, I think, for ministers. I don't think that God intended for ministers to live in ivory towers. But Paul said he worked with his own hands in order to support the needs of himself and those that were with him. He wasn't afraid of work. And so here Paul gives himself to this menial task of gathering sticks, joining with the others in building the fire. Now as he is throwing his bundle of sticks, there is a viper that comes out and attaches to Paul's hand. A very poisonous viper. One that these people were familiar with. When a person was bitten by one of the vipers, they soon fell to the ground, writhing, swelling up and dying.

⁴*So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live."* I mean they thought that Paul must really be guilty of some horrible sin.

⁵*But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm.* In many ways, Paul is sort of one of my favorite heroes. Just, you know, he didn't get all excited. He didn't panic. He just shook the thing off into the fire.

⁶*However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead* (They began to watch him carefully. They expected to see him to just begin to go into convulsions, fall over and die. To die suddenly.) *But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.* (But when he didn't seem to have any ill effects at all. Then they began to say that he is a god. The fickleness of the world. Thinking him first to be a horrible murderer, but now thinking of him to be a god. It can go the other way too, you know. Sometimes you can be a hero and then you can become a goat. The flattery of the world, the adulation of the world, the glory of the world, is so fickle. Take a ball player who goes into a prolonged slump. It used to be that every time the announcer would announce his name, coming to bat, everybody would cheer. They would get the old stomp going. Excited, waiting to see this guy knock one over the wall. But when he goes into a prolonged slump, gets up in many critical situations and fans out, it doesn't take long to when his name is announced that everybody starts to boo. He hasn't come through. He hasn't lived up to their expectations. If you are seeking the glory of the world, be prepared. Because you may be experiencing the glory today, but tomorrow there will be the boo birds out after you. That is why it is so foolish to curry the favor of the world. Favor is deceitful.

⁷*In that region* (The same area where the ship was wrecked.) *there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island,* (He no doubt was the Roman governor over that area.) *whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days.* ⁸*And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him.* ⁹*So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed.* Now Paul began a ministry there. He began to touch many people with the power of God. And as we see this, suddenly we begin to understand a lot of things. We begin to understand the storm that drove the ship. It wasn't haphazard. The Lord was at the wheel. He was guiding in the storm. We know that He was present with Paul in the storm. The Lord was bringing Paul to the island of Malta because the Lord knew there were people there whose hearts were open to the gospel. And so though it seemed like a great tragedy, behind the scenes God was guiding and God was opening up a marvelous door of ministry to Paul. They could not see it at the time. They had given up hope of even surviving the storm. Paul had even become discouraged because the Lord when He came to him and He spoke to him, said be of good cheer! And the Lord assured Paul that he would get to Rome. He had to appear before Caesar. But rather than spending the winter in this port in Crete, the Lord wanted Paul to spend the winter on the island of Malta. And Paul, you remember, was warning them that if you take off this time of the year, I perceive there is going to be a lot of trouble. There are going to be some real problems. They didn't listen to Paul. Paul was probably upset. They didn't take my advice. But yet we see the hand of God behind the scenes guiding.

So many times we do not see the hand of God behind the often adverse circumstances that we are facing. It look to us like tragedy. It looks to us like the end. And many times we are prone to despair over our circumstances because we cannot see what God is doing. The purposes or the plan of God that He is working out. But if we are children of God. If we have committed our lives to Him, we can be sure that all things are working together for good. Though unbeknown to us or unseen by us, God's hand is guiding our lives and the circumstances of our lives. And He has a plan, a purpose and a ministry for us to fulfill. And even through tragedy God works. You see with God the most important thing is that you are in eternity with Him in His kingdom. That's fundamental! That's primary! And whatever it takes to bring you to that place of complete commitment and surrender, God is willing to allow hardships, the storms, to bring you to the place where He has planned to work through your life and in your life.

Now even this venomous viper fastening onto Paul. God had a purpose in that. The purpose of God was to cause these people to realize that there was a divine power at work in this man's life. It opened the door for Paul to be able to minister now to the people because they looked up to him, realizing the power of God was upon his life. Had the venomous viper not fastened onto Paul and he shook it off without any harm, he probably wouldn't have been noticed at all. But because of this what could be looked at as a very unfortunate, horrible, kind of an

experience. How could God allow that to happen to Paul? God used it to open doors for ministry. We've got to be careful of snap judgments of our situation. We need to realize that God is at work and that God has a purpose in all that He does and in all that He allows. And through the storm, God will guide us to those places where He knows there are people who need ministry. So a great ministry opened to Paul. Many people who were sick, came and were healed. And it gave of course, then, the opportunity to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with them.

And so Luke tells us that these people, ¹⁰*They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.* In their response to the work of God in and through Paul's life, they just brought them many wonderful things in appreciation for what God had done through Paul. And when they got ready to leave they just loaded them down with the things that were necessary.

¹¹*After three months* (So Paul was there three months. They wintered there at the island of Malta. And he had three months opportunity to minister. Now Luke doesn't go into many of the details. He doesn't really tell us much about the ministry, the types of sicknesses and all that Paul was able to help those people. He just sort of passes it off, there were many and they came to Paul and were healed.) *we sailed in an Alexandrian ship* (There were many ships that would travel from Egypt to Rome. The Nile delta was an extremely fertile area. Some of the best grain in the world was grown there in the Nile delta. And thus it was famous for the grain. They would bring the ships loaded with grain from Egypt to Rome. Alexandria, Egypt being the major port. And so another ship from Alexandria.) *whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers* (Many times these ships would have the people's god upon bow of the ship. And this ship, Zeus's sons, Castor and Pollux the twins.), *which had wintered at the island.* ¹²*And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days.* So they are on their way to Rome. ¹³*From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli,* (Puteoli was the major port of merchandise in Rome. Just north of Puteoli, the Roman navy was there in the port. And just south of Puteoli was the harbor for the yachts and the ships of the wealthy Romans. But the port for merchandise, where all of the merchandise from the east was brought to Rome, their port was Puteoli.) ¹⁴*where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome.*

Now the gospel had already preceded Paul to Rome. Paul had written to the believers in Rome. His epistle to the Romans, (and we will start that next week), Paul's marvelous epistle to the Romans. And so there were already believers there in Rome. In Puteoli there were believers. The gospel is now beginning to infiltrate throughout the Roman empire.

¹⁵*And from there, when the brethren heard about us* (That is, in Rome.), *they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns.* Now the Appii Forum is about forty three miles from Rome towards Puteoli and the Three Inns or taverns was about thirty three miles. So the believers came out from Rome to meet this illustrious man, Paul, who had written to them. In the last chapter of Romans, as he names the various people in the church in Rome, it shows that Paul had a pretty good relationship and knowledge of the believers there in Rome. And so hearing that Paul was on his way, they came out to meet him.

You know it's a wonderful thing. *When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.* It's a wonderful thing, the family of God, the body of Christ, because no matter where you are in the world, when you meet with the body of believers, you feel at home! There is just a warmth. There is just a comfort. You don't feel strange any more, but you just feel like I'm with the family. And though there may be cultural, vast cultural differences, yet our faith in Christ removes all of those barriers and there is just a feeling of being at home. Though you may not be able to communicate because of the language barrier. Yet there is a communication in the Spirit that you just feel at home.

I remember when we were in Athens, Greece. We went to a church one evening. And it was just a beautiful experience. We met with the people in that church and we couldn't speak Greek and they couldn't speak English, but yet it was just a wonderful meeting. We were able to communicate our love for Jesus Christ and not verbally, but it was such a great feeling of just being at home, because you are with the family of God.

Kay and I went to a village in New Guinea, a very primitive condition. And walking through the village, we felt very strange. These old men sitting around with their teeth almost eaten away by the beetle that they chewed on. Their mouths were red and their teeth were almost gone. They would get a high off it. And they would just sit around and chew this stuff. They would look and give you a toothless smile, but you could sort of tell they

were off in “nah-nah” land. But the chief of the village was a Christian. So he ordered a feast for us. They dug the pit. They put in the rocks. Built the fire. They got the rocks real hot. Then they covered the rocks with banana leaves and began to put in food. Then they covered again with banana leaves, more food, covered with banana leaves, their various types of food. Then they put banana leaves over the top and then about six inches of dirt. And there was a bamboo shoot that went on down to the bottom of the hot rocks. They cooked all day in this pit. And every once in a while, a native would pour a cup of water down in there to steam it. And finally when dinner time was ready, they would take off the dirt and peel off the banana leaves and bring the food to the table. There were natives there with big palm things fanning us and keeping the flies off the food. And around the fence of the area where we were eating, most of the village had gathered. They weren’t allowed to come in where we were, but they were gathered at the fence. The food, much of it, was very delicious, but some of it was a little difficult to eat. So we would take that over to the kids that were hanging around the fence and slip it to them. They were very happy to get it. And we were happy not to have to eat it. But this chieftain of the village couldn’t of course speak English and I couldn’t speak their dialect either. But yet there was something that happened. A spiritual thing, where his heart was bonded with my heart. As we looked at each other, there was a spiritual bond that was created. And I just felt at home in this primitive culture, language barrier, and yet that work of God’s Spirit crossed these boundaries and knitted our hearts together. He hugged me. I hugged him. We looked at each other and smiled at each other, though we couldn’t talk to each other. But the missionary that was working in the village began to translate for us, as he welcomed us and as we acknowledged the graciousness of their love. And then they brought out these spears. The chieftain handed me this bundle of spears. There was a dollar bill wrapped in the thing. And the chieftain said to me through the interpreter, “Before the missionaries came and brought us the Bible, I used these spears to kill men. But now that I have the Bible, I don’t need them anymore, thus I want to give the spears to you.” So, I have a bundle of spears that have been used to kill people, but they remind me of the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to transform people’s life. And they also remind me of how the gospel can bring a bonding between people of widely varying cultures.

So they came out to meet Paul. Paul seeing them was greatly comforted. He thanked God. And it is always a glorious experience. We went to Garoka on that same trip, Kay and I. There in Garoka, we sat down with a young lady, who had started a school there in Garoka. And she began to share with us how God had used her to pray for a man in the village who was blind. And God opened his eyes. In another case she showed how the Lord had raised a person from the dead. A very simple gal with a simple faith in Jesus Christ. As she was sharing with us again through the interpreter we felt such a bond, such a love. Family! We’re with family. Seven thousand miles away from home, but we are family! But there is that warmth and all of the feeling of the family.

Later we, my son and I, went over to Indonesia. We flew into a native village where when we landed, we were a hundred and fifty miles from the closest road. If we would have had problems with the plane we could still be there. But as we landed, both sides of the run way, all of the village came out to greet us as we landed. Loin clothes is about all the men or the women wore. I mean it was really primitive. They took us to the house of a lady who was quite ill, to pray for her. A marvelous saint of God! Again through the missionary, we talked, conversed with her. She opened up her heart and was sharing, her ministry, her love for the Lord, and you just feel like you are at home. The bond, the comfort, the strength that comes from the body of Christ!

So they heard that Paul was on his way. So they came on out to meet Paul. ¹⁶*Now when we came to Rome,* (It’s been quite a process getting there. Back earlier in Acts as Paul was leaving Ephesus, he told them, I’m going to journey over to Macedonia and to Achaia. Then I’m going to Jerusalem. I want to be there in time for the feast. But he said, I must also see Rome! As we move into the Book of Romans next week, Paul in writing to them expressed to them the desire to come. How that he had planned to come. How things had gotten in the way in his previous attempts to plan and get to Rome, but he desired to come to them that he might impart to them some Spiritual gift. That there might be a mutual benefit to them and to himself by his being with them. And then as Paul said for, I am ready to preach the gospel to those who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Because it is the power of God. So he was expressing his desire to go to Rome. Now he tells the church, the men of Ephesus, I’m going to make this journey through Greece and to Jerusalem, but then I must also see Rome.

When he was in Jerusalem, arrested, thinking that maybe his ministry was over. The Lord came to him in prison at night and told him even as he had born witness of Christ in Jerusalem, so he was to bear witness also in Rome.

When they were on this ship and they thought that surely they would be lost at sea, again the angel of the Lord stood by Paul and told him that though the ship would be wrecked, everyone would be saved because you must appear before Caesar. So now when they came to Rome! A long journey, a hard way of getting there. But now it is accomplished and Paul arrives at Rome.) *the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.* So Paul was given special treatment.

¹⁷*And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: "Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans,* ¹⁸*who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. ¹⁹But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. ²⁰For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain."* Now Paul was always chained. Twenty fours a day to a Roman guard. They changed the guard three times a day. But there was always this chain. And so Paul said it was for the hope of Israel. Now what is the hope of Israel? The Messiah, the promised Messiah, the Hope of Israel that God would send the anointed King, the promised Messiah! And Paul said it is for the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain. I don't really have anything against the Jews though they forced me to appeal to Caesar. They wanted me to be put to death, but I hadn't really done anything that was worthy of death. But he was assuring the Jewish leadership that he was not there going to condemn the Jewish nation or the Jewish people. But he was there because of his hope and the hope of Israel.

²¹*Then they said to him, "We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you.* (In other words, we don't know anything about it. We haven't heard about it. We haven't heard about you.) ²²*But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere."* (What do you think about this sect? This rising sect. That is the sect of those Jews who believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah. And so it was looked upon by the Jews as a sect or a branch of Judaism, which indeed it really was. Paul didn't ever think of himself as not a Jew. Paul always saw himself as a Jew, a Pharisee of the Pharisees. But Paul had come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. That did not make him any less a Jew, it only made him a fulfilled Jew because he acknowledged that God was faithful to His promises. And God did send the Messiah. And it was that hope of all the Jews for the coming of the Messiah. And Paul came to the realization that God kept His promise. Jesus is the Messiah and thus he was looked upon as a part of this sect. But the early church did not attempt to break away from being Jews. They continued to go to the temple for prayer. They continued to worship in the temple. You remember Peter and John were on their way into the temple when they met the lame man and he was healed. And so theirs was not an attempt to break away but just to recognize that the whole law was fulfilled in Jesus. That they didn't need the sin offerings any more because Jesus was offered for sin once and for all. And so the fulfillment of the promises, the hope of Israel. So, oh man, for a man like Paul, you know, lick your chops Paul. They want to hear what you think about Jesus, about this sect, you know.

²³*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, from morning till evening.* So Paul spent a whole day, sharing with the truths of the Word of God. Showing them out of the law, the books of Moses. Out of the prophets, how that Jesus fulfilled those many conditions that were sort of a mystery to the Jews. Because the Scriptures also spoke of the eternal reign of the Messiah in the Kingdom of God. But It also spoke of His being despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. It spoke about His death. It spoke about His crucifixion. And thus, Paul showed to them how that the same Messiah, Jesus, fulfilled those predictions of being despised, rejected. The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone and all. And he shared that with them, also that Jesus was

coming again as the reigning Messiah, as a ruling Messiah and was going to establish the Kingdom of God here on earth. So it isn't the fact that the kingdom isn't going to come. It will. And Jesus will return as the reigning King, but it was first of all necessary that he make an offering of sin. Offering Himself. So Paul from morning unto evening went through the Scriptures with them. Expounding. Opening up. Teaching them out of the Scriptures, concerning Jesus.

And we read. ²⁴*And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.* Isn't that interesting? How that people are different. They can hear the truth of God. They can hear of the Kingdom of God. They can see the prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus. They can be offered proof that Jesus is the Messiah because there is no greater proof than the fulfilled prophecies. As Peter said, we were eyewitnesses of His glory. But we have a more sure Word of prophesy. I can testify to you. I saw it. But I have something even more certain than that. It is the prophecies that He fulfilled. Strong, powerful, indisputable evidence that Jesus was the Son of God. The prophecies that He fulfilled. Mathematically it is impossible that one man could fulfill those prophecies. The law of compound probabilities makes it a mathematical impossibility. And yet Jesus did! And so some believed and some did not.

²⁵*So when they did not agree among themselves, (They began to dispute with each other.) they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, ²⁶saying,* (Notice that Paul here is declaring his belief in the inspiration of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit spoke to Isaiah. Paul writing to Timothy said all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Acknowledging that the Bible is God's Word to man and God's revelation of Himself to man. That the Holy Spirit is the author of the book, although there were many different writers over a long period of time, yet it is one consistent story because the Holy Spirit is the author.)

'Go to this people and say:

"Hearing you will hear, Now you remember this is back in Isaiah, chapter six, where King Uzziah the popular king had died. Uzziah was a very popular king. In fact the name of Uzziah, it said was on the lips of all the people. I mean everybody's. He was just the kind of a leader that everybody liked and everybody looked up to. You just felt confident, you know, you felt secure. King Uzziah, he'll take care of it. It was a prosperous kingdom and everyone was feeling great. And they were looking to this man for strength, for comfort, for security. And when he died everybody was shook up. What are we going to do? Uzziah is dead. And Isaiah was among them. And he said in the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. You know it's interesting that how often times the Lord has to remove our idols so that we will see Him. Sometimes we get our eyes upon men. We begin to look to men. God wants us to look to Him. And if you get your eyes on men, sometimes God will remove that man so that you will see Him. That you find your security upon God not in some man, but in God. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord. High and lifted up. And His glory filled the temple. Then said I woe is me, I'm a man of unclean lips. I dwell among a people of unclean lips. Then the cherubim took the coals from off the fire and put it on his lips and said now you are clean. And then he said I hear a voice saying, who will go for Me? Who shall I send? And Isaiah answered, here I am send me. That's when God said to Isaiah, go unto this people and say, hearing you shall hear and shall not understand;

And seeing you will see, and not perceive; (Though you hear you won't understand. Though you see, you won't perceive. In other words, there was to be a Spiritual blindness. And there was a Spiritual blindness over the people. You go. Give them the message but they are not going hear it. They are not going to see it because they are afflicted with a Spiritual malady.

²⁷*For the hearts of this people have grown dull.*

Their ears are hard of hearing,

And 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." Now it is interesting that in the thirteenth chapter of the gospel of Matthew, when Jesus began to teach in parables. The disciples asked Jesus why He had started teaching in parables. And Jesus in explaining why He went to teaching in parables, quoted this prophesy of Isaiah. But the interesting thing is that Jesus said therefore I speak to them in parables because they seeing, see not. And hearing, they hear not

neither do they understand. Now there are some who think that Jesus started speaking in parables to hide the truth. Not so. The opposite. The purpose of a parable or a story isn't to hide the truth, it's to open the truth. It's to give you an illustration to help you understand it. It's to show you the truth in practical operation. How this truth operates. So the people were not just receiving the straight truth from Jesus. They were seeing but they did not see. They were hearing, but they did not hear. So He reverted to story telling. That is telling stories as parables by which the truth would be illustrated so that they could see then the illustration or truth because their condition was as Isaiah described. Having ears to hear they did not hear. Eyes to see, they did not see. Their hearts did not receive. Then John in chapter twelve, speaking of the hardness of the people's hearts, also quoted Isaiah. And how this same prophesy of Isaiah, concerning the condition of the people who saw but did not see. Heard but did not hear.

Now Paul, this is the fourth time that the prophesy of Isaiah is used to describe the people of Israel and their blindness to the things of God. Paul the apostle spoke of those whose eyes were blinded by the God of this world. And that is encompassing so many people. John said in context with his, having eyes to see, they see not and so forth, said therefore they could not believe. Why? Because the god of this world has blinded their eyes. Seeing, they don't see. Hearing, they don't hear. Therefore they could not believe because they could not hear, they could not see. And such is the sad condition of many people today. Whose eyes are blinded to the truth. Whose ears are deaf to the truth, therefore they cannot believe. Paul quotes it now. Saying, go to this people, saying hearing you shall hear and will not understand. Seeing, you will see but not perceive. For the heart of the people is callous, their ears are dull.

²⁸*"Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!"* Now this again was prophesied. That the gospel would go to the Gentiles. It was prophesied in the Old Testament. And Paul as we get into Romans, will give us some of the quotations where God promised that the gentiles would hear and would receive the gospel. ²⁹*And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.*

Now a little insight. ³⁰*Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him,* Now he was first in the lodging. But now Paul was allowed to rent a house in Rome. He was still chained to the Roman guard, but he was now renting his own facility, his own house in Rome for two years. As he was waiting for Caesar Nero to call him for his trial. At this time Nero was about twenty five years old. He'd already began to reveal his colors as a very wicked and evil man. He had murdered his mother and then he had murdered his wife, Octavia. And he was a tyrant. At this time there was a great weakening of the Roman power. The senate by now was down to about seven hundred and fifty men from the thousand or so that used to rule. But as the power was gradually being given to the emperor, the power of the senate was diminishing. Rome was on the decline at this time. Paul did not see Rome in all of its glory. He saw it as it was fading. It had become a very, very wicked city. About two million people in Rome. One half of them were slaves. There was a very small group of wealthy people and then there was a large group of just common people who were most of them out of work. They didn't have housing. They were sort of the homeless type. But they were one step above a slave. Conditions were very bad, morally, spiritually. To this darkened city, the gospel has come. The light of the gospel had begun to shine.

Now going back to the beginning of Acts, Jesus said you will be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth. Paul is now in Rome, the center of the world. From Jerusalem, one of the uttermost parts of the earth. What is he doing? ³¹*preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.* Or unhindered. God has opened the door to Paul, there in Rome. Now again we see the hand of God behind the scene. Here he is in Rome, chained. This allows Paul time to write. Time on his hands. He was still a prisoner. He could not really move about Rome freely. So it gave him the time to write his letter to the Ephesian church. To write the letter to the Colossians. To write the letter to the Philippians. To write the letter to Philemon. And in these letters we get a little insight in to how God was using him in Rome. As he speaks how that the gospel of Jesus Christ was being spoken of throughout the whole palace. Don't you know that every soldier that came and was guarding Paul, chained to Paul, got eight hours of the gospel? And many of them were converted. So that those of Caesar's household, he said, many of them are now saved. So had Paul had the freedom, he probably would not have had

time to write Ephesians. And think of what we would have lost today if we didn't have this glorious message to the church, that tells us of the glory of Christ in the church. Think of what we would have lost if didn't have his letter to the Philippians that speaks of the joy that we can have in the midst of hardships. Think of what we would have lost if we didn't have the letter to the Colossians that speaks of the excellency and of the preeminence of Jesus Christ. Think of what we would have lost if we didn't have the letter of Philemon, which speaks to us so beautifully of the glorious intercessory work of Jesus Christ. If he owes you anything, put it to my account. So while there in prison, Paul came across Onesimus. He was converted. He became a servant of Paul. But then Paul sent him back with a letter to Philemon. Luke was there with Paul in Rome. Trophimus was there for a time. Paul sent the letter to the church in Ephesus by Trophimus. Aristarchus was with Paul. Mark had come and had visited Paul. He had brought him some parchments. So Paul in his letters to the Philippians, and Colossians and Ephesians, speaks of many of those that were with him there in Rome. As God had brought him to this wicked city to bring the glorious light of the gospel of Jesus Christ! And had left him in chains that he might have the time to write these epistles that were not only a blessing and benefit to the churches to which they were sent but they have become a blessing throughout the church history to us today who are blessed because God allowed him this imprisonment in Rome.

God looks down the road. Not just for what He does and can do in your life now. But what will happen in time to come. And many times it is in the hardships and in the hard places that God is at work, though we may not be able to see it. Yet behind the scene God is working in your life. That is why the Scriptures exhort us to rejoice in tribulation. Not to be weary in well doing, knowing that in due season we will reap if we faint not. To trust in the Lord in all of the circumstances, knowing that all things are working together for good if we love God and are called according to His purposes. And so we endure with Paul, as seeing the invisible. What we see doesn't look so good. Paul said we don't look at those things which we see. They are temporal. But we look at things which we cannot see because they are eternal! And that is an important lesson for us. To keep our eyes on the Lord and on things of the Spirit because there ours is the victory.

Father, we thank You for this journey through the book of Acts as we see the birth of the church and as we see the ministry of the church. And Lord as we actually have a model for the church. To realize, Lord, that starting out with just a few there in Jerusalem, that a hundred and twenty grew into thousands, into millions. The Roman Empire was conquered with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Lord, we pray that as we observe this model of the church, that we too Lord, will become Your witnesses in our Jerusalems, in our Judeas, in our Samarias, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. Lord, we thank You for what You have done in bringing this to pass. Continue Lord, and we ask that You will help us to continue to be all that You want us to be, Lord. Ever sensitive to the leading of the Spirit. Ever cognizant of our total dependency upon the Spirit, knowing that of ourselves, we can do nothing. But learning, Lord, to trust in You and to rely upon You, acknowledging that Jesus is the head of the body, His church. And Lord, we are only here to follow Your orders. Make us to be everything You want us to be. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.