

Saul-Paul In The Acts Of The Apostles

Saul Comes On The Scene (Chapter 9)

Surrender (Acts 9:1-9)

A Christian Welcome (9:10-18)

Ananias is called to help Saul

“Straight” Street (3 Parts)

Center Part for Traffic

Two “Sidewalks” for pedestrians and vendors.

“Bad” man = Enemy – hard (“unpleasant”) for Ananias to do

– Still followed God’s request

Approached Saul and called him “Brother”

What does this “say” to us??? –One of the most sublime examples of Christian LOVE.

“Saul” became Paul - Baptism

Witnessing For Christ (9:19-22)

This is Luke’s account after Conversion – “Surrender”

Paul’s Chronology is in Galatians 1:15-24

Conversion on road to Damascus

Preaches in Damascus

Goes to Arabia

Returns to Jerusalem

Escapes from Jerusalem to Caesarea

Returns to region of Syria and Cilicia

So we see Paul doing 2 Things

- 1) Immediately bore witness in Damascus where there were many Jews and Synagogues which required a lot of courage on Paul’s part who had letters to imprison the Christians.
- 2) Went to Arabia for 2 things: **guidance** for a strange new life and **strength** for an overwhelming task. He went to **God** for both.

Do we have the knowledge and strength to do this in our own lives? Where can we go to “fuel” ourselves with both of these?

Escaping By The Skin Of His Teeth (9:23-25)

A few words (*after some time*) imply a lot.

This “some time” was three years during which time Paul worked and preached in Damascus.

Jews were determined to kill him, even setting guards at the gates so he could not escape. Walls with houses at the top with overhanging windows.

Paul escapes through being let down one of these windows in a basket.

Paul is only at the beginning of his adventures for Christ and he is escaping with his life.

- 1) This incident is a witness to Paul’s courage. He saw the animosity against him and realized Christianity was not going to be easy. Paul rejoiced in these dangers, it gave him a chance to demonstrate his new found loyalty to the Master he had persecuted.
- 2) It is also a witness to the **effectiveness** of Paul’s preaching. The Jews were so ineffective in their debates with him that they had to resort to violence. To suffer persecution is to be paid the greatest compliment because it is proof that men think we really matter.

How does our life, love and preaching of God’s word effect our “friends” and acquaintances? What can we do to show God’s love for them? Once again, what can we do to get God’s instruction and strength?

Rejected In Jerusalem (9:26-31)

Paul arrives in Jerusalem and is under the greatest suspicion. He caused havoc in the church there, dragging men and women to prison.

Crucial moments instrumental in winning Paul for the Church:

Church owed Paul to the prayer of Stephen.

Owed Paul to the forgiving spirit of Ananias.

Now owing Paul to the large-hearted charity of Barnabas – took him by the hand and stood “sponsor” to him.

By this action Barnabas showed himself to be a really Christian man:

He was a man who insisted on believing the best of others.

He was a man who never held anyone’s past against him.

How can we apply Barnabas' "virtues to our own personal lives?"

Paul once again debates with the Greek-speaking Jews and probably went to the same synagogues where he opposed Stephen.

Here again, he is in danger of his life.

Do we "back down" when our love for Christ is questioned?

The Acts Of Peter (9:32-43)

Paul had center stage, now Peter comes "stage front". This passage really follows from Acts 8:25, and shows Peter in Action.

It shows us the source of Peter's power – he did not heal Aeneas but "*Jesus Christ heals you*". Before he healed Tabitha-Dorcas (gazelle) Peter prayed.

Interesting word – twice the Christians at Lydda are called *saints* (hagios = holy or different) also used by Ananias to describe the Christians at Jerusalem (v 13) and Paul always uses it to describe the church members in his letters.

Saints was used to describe the Israelites (different people) they are specifically a holy people, a different people – God had chosen them to do his work. But they disobeyed.

The Church became the true Israel for the special purposes of God. So then we who are Christians are not different from others in that we are chosen for greater honor on this earth; we are different (*saints*) in that we are chosen for a greater service. We are saved to serve.

Are we "Saints"? Are we saved, are we serving God? What can we do in our own lives to be truly "Saints".

Turning point for Peter and the Gentiles

A Devout Soldier (10:1-8)

Cornelius was a Roman centurion stationed at Caesarea.

He was a *God-fearer*.

He was given to Charity

He was a man of Prayer

Peter Learns A Lesson (10:9-16)

Before Cornelius could be welcomed into the Church, Peter had to learn a lesson.

Strict food laws: could not eat "**unclean**" food.

The Meeting Of Peter And Cornelius (10:17-33)

Jews believed that other nations were outside the mercy of God. He would never have as a guest nor ever be the guest of a man who did not observe the Law.

The Heart Of The Gospel (10:34-43)

This is the barest summary of what Peter said to Cornelius – the very essence of the first preaching about Jesus:

- Jesus was sent by God and empowered with the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus exercised a ministry of healing.
- They crucified him
- He rose again
- The Christian preacher and teacher is a witness of the resurrection
- The result of this is forgiveness of sins and a new relationship with God.

The Entry Of The Gentiles (10:44-48)

As Peter spoke, things began to happen (Jewish Christians could not argue) the Spirit came upon Cornelius and friends; they spoke in tongues, which was the final proof that God had given His Spirit to the Gentiles.

Peter On His Defense (11:1-10)

A Convincing Story (11:11-18)

Great Things In Antioch (11:19-21)

The Wisdom Of Barnabas (11:22-26)

Church in Jerusalem got word that Antioch was “going to the “dogs” (Gentiles) and sent Barnabas to “investigate.”

Fortunately they sent him and not someone of a rigid mind who made a god of the Law and stuck strictly to its rules and regulations.

- Barnabas had the biggest heart.
- Had stood by Paul and sponsored him when all men suspected him (Acts 9:27).
- Gave proof of his generosity to the needy (Acts 4:36,37).
- Was glad to see the gentiles come into the church.
- Needed to have someone in charge who must be:
 - Double background
 - Courage
 - Skilled in argument – attacked by Jews and Gentiles
- Barnabas knew the best man.
 - For nine years heard nothing of Paul
 - Last saw him lowered in a basket – Caesarea to Tarsus (Acts 9:30)
- It was in Antioch they were first called *Christian*. *-iani* = *belonging to the party of*.

What virtues of Barnabas do I see (or NOT see) in my life? What virtues, attributes of Paul do I see (or NOT see) in my life? Paul and Barnabas had a deep spiritual friendship with each other, how can I develop a spiritual relationship with my Christian/non-Christian friends.

Helping In Trouble (11:27-30)

In the early Church there were three sets of leaders:

- Apostles; Their authority was not confined to one church and were held in the highest honor.
- Elders; local officials and their authority was limited to the church where they were “installed”.
- Prophets;
 - the name indicates their function – *fore-teller* and *forth-teller* told the future and told the will of God
 - held in the highest honor
 - they had special gifts
 - had special dangers – true prophets and false prophets

How do I (can I) show my leadership in the church (The body of Christ)? What can I do to bring Christ (Christ's help) to the suffering Body of Christ? What can I do to get others to help the suffering Body of Christ?

Imprisonment And Deliverance (12:1-11)

The Joy Of Restoration (12:12-19)

A Terrible End (12:20-25)

Paul and Barnabas return from their errand of mercy (Acts 11:27-30) to Antioch and take with them John Mark.

Paul's First Missionary Journey (Chapters 13 & 14)

Sent Out By The Holy Spirit (13:1-3)

The Christian Church took a big step when under the guidance of the Holy Spirit they deliberately decided to take the gospel out to all the world. They did not do what they wanted to do but what God wanted them to do.

Prophets and Teachers had different functions:

- *Prophets* were wandering preachers who had given their whole lives listening for the word of God then taking that word to their fellow men.
- *Teachers* were the men in the local churches whose duty it was to instruct converts in the faith.

This list of prophets indicates the universal appeal of the gospel

- Barnabas – a Jew from Cyprus
- Lucius came from Cyrene in North Africa

- Simeon was also a Jew but with his Roman name of Niger indicates he moved in Roman circles. (speculated that he was the Simon of Cyrene who help Jesus carry the cross)
- Manaen had aristocratic connections
- Paul a Jew from Tarsus and a trained rabbi.

Do we open the ears of our heart to hear the Holy Spirit directing us to spread the Gospel? What can we do to help ourselves hear and understand His directions?

Success In Cyprus (13:4-12)

Barnabas was from Cyprus (Acts 4:36) and since he typically wanted to share the treasure of Jesus to his own people the group went first to Cyprus (a Roman province famous for its copper mines and ship-building industry)

Paul never chose the easy way, he and Barnabas preached in Paphos, the capitol of the island and infamous for its worship of Venus, the goddess of love.

Sergius Paulus, the governor and an intelligent man, kept wizards and fortune tellers including Bar-Jesus (Elymas –in Arabic), who was afraid if the governor turned to Christianity, he would loose all his “bennies”. But Paul dealt with him very effectively.

From this point on Saul (Jewish) is called Paul (Greek)

What can we do when someone twists our words against us/Christian/Jesus?

The Deserter (13:13)

Barnabas was the leader of the expedition, but now Paul’s name is first so Paul has assumed leadership with no complaints from Barnabas.

This verse refers to the biography of John Mark – known best as **Mark** – who was a deserter who redeemed himself. He was a very young lad that Paul and Barnabas, to whom Mark was related, took as a helper, but he turned and went home. We don’t know why.

For a time, Paul could not forgive Mark. Second missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to take Mark and Paul refused (Acts 15:38) and he and Barnabas split company for good over it. Mark then vanishes from history until he re-emerges almost 20 years later, Paul writing to the Colossians from prison in Rome, tells them to receive Mark if he comes to them, and in writing to Timothy just before his death, he says, “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful in serving me.” (2 Timothy 4:11). This man who

was once a deserter, is the writer of a gospel and the man whom, at the end, Paul wanted beside him.

Can we “forgive and forget?” Do we “give up” when we are rejected or we have rejected others? What do we need to do to focus on what God wants from us?

An Adventurous Journey For A Sick Man (13:14-15)

One of the amazing things about Acts is the heroism that is passed over in a sentence. Pisidian Antioch stood on a plateau 3,600 feet above sea-level. To get to it, Paul and Barnabas would have to cross the Taurus mountain range on the hardest road (robbers and brigands) in Asia Minor.

Why did they leave the coast and go this difficult and dangerous route?

Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians (includes the people of Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe) “You know it was because of a bodily ailment (“thorn in the flesh”) that I preached the Gospel to you at first” (Galatians 4:13). So he was a sick man – recurring migraine headaches from malaria fever which was common in the low coastal strip of Asia Minor.

Even when Paul’s body was aching, he never ceased to drive on and to be an adventurer for Christ.

Do we give up when we are “uncomfortable (physically, mentally, emotionally). What can we do to help us “go on” in living God’s Word?

The Preaching Of Paul (13:16-41)

This is an very important passage – it is the only full-length report of a sermon by Paul that we possess. When we compare this with the sermon of Peter in Acts 2 the main elements in it are seen to be precisely the same.

1. Paul insists that the coming of Jesus is the consummation of history. He outlines the national history of the Jews to show that it culminates in Christ.
2. He states the fact that men did not recognize God’s consummation when it came in Jesus Christ.
3. Although men rejected and crucified Jesus, God could not be defeated and the resurrection is the proof of the undefeatable purpose and power of God.
4. Paul uses a purely Jewish argument: the resurrection is the fulfillment of prophecy because promises were made to

David which were obviously not fulfilled in him but are fulfilled in Christ.

5. The coming of Christ is to one people (Jews) good news: tried to live life according to the Law but could never keep it completely causing failure and guilt, but in Jesus men find forgiveness which sets them free from condemnation and restores friendship with God.
6. Another kind of people this is bad news: it simply makes worse the condemnation of those who have seen it and have disobeyed its summons to believe in Jesus Christ.

What can we do to proclaim God's word? What is our "relationship" with God? What can we do to develop a closer relationship with Him?

Trouble At Antioch (13:42-52)

Antioch in Pisidia was a very volatile city. Its population was made up of Greeks, Jews, Romans and native Phrygians (emotional/unstable). Here the Jews and special privileges, even for the women, and were afraid they would lose these to the uncircumcised gentiles. The Jews saw the heathen as chaff to be burned; Jesus saw them as a harvest to be reaped for God."

Pray and work that we do not stray from God's plan of love for ALL MEN even when they go "against" us and our beliefs.

On To Iconium (14:1-7)

Iconium was 90 miles from Antioch. The city was so old it claimed to be older than Damascus

As usual they began in the synagogue with good success, but the jealous Jews stirred up the mob and once again, Paul and Barnabas were taking their lives in their Hands. What was proposed to the mob was "a lynching". Being away from the major cities (where Rome kept order) there was local "justice" using mob violence.

What do we do when "our faith" is threatened (by others or ourselves)? What can we do to strengthen ourselves and standup for our beliefs?

Mistaken For Gods At Lystra (14:8-18)

Paul and Barnabas had a "strange" incident. Explanation: Zeus and Hermes (gods) came to earth and were not recognized or accepted by the people of Lystra except for an old couple Philemon and

Baucis who took them in; and all others were eliminated. (Two great trees.)

So When Paul healed the man, the citizens thought they were Zeus and Hermes revisiting, and were not taking any chances.

This passage gives us Paul's approach to those who were completely heathen and without any Jewish background to which he could appeal. He started from nature to get to the God who was behind it all. He started from the here and now in order to get to the there and then. We do well to remember that the world is the garment of the living God.

Do we have "different" repertoires" for different people/situations? Do we have any suggestions for bringing God to "others?" Do we recognize God's hand in Nature; others; things; even OUR lives?

The Courage Of Paul (14:19-20)

At Lystra, certain Jews arrived for possibly two reasons:

- They may have been deliberately following Paul and Barnabas in an attempt to undo the work that they were doing.
- Or they may have been corn merchants.

Lystra was a Roman colony but it was an outpost. This is why they dragged his "body" outside the city. They were afraid of the strong hand of Roman justice, and trying to get rid of the body.

Outstanding feature is the sheer courage of Paul. His first act was to go right back into the city where he had been stoned. John Wesley said "Always look a mob in the face." A deed like this – going back among those who tried to murder him – would have more effect than a hundred sermons.

What can we do to NOT give up in the face of adversity, or test of our faith? How can we get the outstanding courage of Paul to stand up to those who persecute us or our faith?

Confirming The Church (14:21-28)

Three insights into the mind of Paul:

1. His complete honesty to the new Christian people. It was through many afflictions that they would have to enter into the kingdom of God. There was no easy way.
2. On the return journey, Paul appointed elders in all the little groups of new Christians. It was his conviction that Christianity must be lived in a fellowship. "No man can have God for his

father unless he has the Church for his mother.” From the beginning, Paul’s aim was not to make individual Christians but to build these individuals into a Christian fellowship.

3. Paul and Barnabas never considered their strength achieved anything, but they spoke of what God had done with them. We begin to have the right idea of Christian service when we work, not for our own honor, but from the conviction that we are tools in the hand of God.

What can we do to better serve “God’s will” and still give Him the credit and not ourselves?

A Problem Solved And Second Missionary Journey – Chapters 15 - 18

A Problem Becomes Acute (15:1-5)

It was almost by accident that the Gospel was being preached to Jew and Gentile alike and they were living together as brethren. Yet for certain Jews all this was unthinkable. They were willing to accept them, but only if they became Jews. Christianity would have become just another sect of Judaism. Paul and Barnabas were strongly against this, resulting in a deadlock.

The only way out was to make an appeal to headquarters of the Church (Jerusalem). The case they prepared was simply to tell the story (the facts, just the facts) speak for themselves. This was not acceptable for certain Pharisee Christians, they must be circumcised and keep the law.

The fundamental principle: was the gift of God for the select few or for the world. We fully realize the true meaning of Christianity only when all walls of partition are broken down.

Was the gift of God for the select few or for all the world? How can we combat the divisions between class and class, nation and nation, color and color.

Peter States The Case(15:6-12)

Peter went directly to his experience (10 years before) of accepting Cornelius into the Church His proof was that he acted rightly through the Holy Spirit who cleansed the “unclean” by cleansing their hearts. There was only one way to God (not the hundreds of Jewish laws) by accepting the free gift of the grace of God in an act of self-surrendering faith.

Can a man earn the favor of God? Or must he admit his own helplessness and be ready in humble faith to accept what the grace of God gives? The paradox of Christianity is that the way to victory

through surrender; the way to power is through admitting one's own helplessness.

What does Religion mean to me (keeping the law and/or casting ourselves on the grace of God)? Is our faith based on works or Grace?

The Leadership Of James (15:13-21)

The reception of the Gentiles was held in (silent) balance when James (the leader – not a formal office - of the Church in Jerusalem) spoke. The leadership conceded to him because:

- He was an outstanding man
- He was the brother (relative) of Jesus
- He had a special (all by himself) resurrection appearance (I *Corinthians 15:7*)
- He was a pillar of the Church. Knees hard as camel's – knelt in prayer. Called James the Just.
- **He was a rigorous observer the Law.**

Since he was on the side of the Gentiles, then they should be allowed into the Church.

To make it easier for a strict Jew to consort with a Gentile, James suggests certain regulations for the Gentiles to keep.

- Abstain from food (meat) contaminated by being sacrificed to idols (*1 Corinthians Chapters 8 & 9*)
- Abstain from fornication.
- Abstain

The observance of these destroyed the last barrier between Jew and Gentile. Now within the Church Jew and Gentile were one.

How do we look at those of other religions? Do we force them to follow OUR ways? Can they be saved without becoming Episcopalian? What can we do to direct them to “salvation?”

The Decree Goes Out 15:22-35)

With this decision, the Church acted with both efficiency and courtesy.

The decision was written in a letter which was sent by special messengers, Judas and Silas who went to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. If Paul and Barnabas went alone with the letter, their enemies might have doubted the authenticity of the letter. Judas and Silas were official emissaries and guaranteed the authenticity of the decision. A letter could have sounded coldly official; but the

words of Judas and Silas added a friendly warmth that the letter by itself could have achieved.

Paul Takes The Road Again (15:36-41)

Paul could not stay long in one place. He decided to take to the road again, which ended in a serious breach of friendship. Barnabas wanted to take Mark but Paul did not want to take someone who deserted them in Pamphylia. They split company, never to work with each other again. Barnabas took Mark and Paul took Silas. Mark became the man who redeemed himself. It may have been Barnabas' friendship which gave Mark back his self respect. It is a great thing for a man to have someone who believes in him.

**Do we hold grudges? Can this effect our/their faith?
What can we do to bring friendships lost to friendships gained?**

The Second Missionary Journey

A Son In The Faith (16:1-5)

Five years since Paul was in Lystra and Derbe

Found a young man that became very dear to him – Timothy

- Son of a “mixed” marriage (Mother – Jew, Father – Gentile)
- Circumcised him – accepted him as a Jew, thus breaking down all national barriers
- Timothy had good mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5)
- Paul's messenger – (1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Thess. 3:2-6)
- He was in Rome during Paul's imprisonment – (Phil. 1:1-2; Col.1:1; Philemon 1)
- Paul called him his son – (Philippians 2:19-20)
- Paul saw Timothy as his successor, which made him happy to see the result of his training.

**How do we look at others of different or mixed faiths?
Does our love for each other reflect in those we share our Christian love? Are we proud of those we have “trained” in Christian Love?**

The Gospel Comes To Europe (16:6-10)

Paul was barred (by the Holy Spirit) from the Roman province of Asia.

How did the Holy Spirit send this message (prophet; vision; inner conviction; his ill health)

What makes this “ill health” most likely is that in verse 10 he suddenly changes from the third person to the first person “we”

Met Luke who was a doctor and Paul may have sought his professional services. It is possible Paul took his weakness and pain (“Thorn”) as a message from God

Who was the man from Macedonia which finally gave Paul his guidance?

Who was the man in his vision?

- Luke
- Alexander the Great

Who have we had in our own lives that have led us closer to god’s word and Gods love? Do we thank God for them?

Europe’s First Convert (16:11-15)

Philippi was a seaport stronghold and was a Roman colony implanted with groups of army veterans that wore Roman dress, spoke Roman language; used Roman laws. They were “proud” to be Roman citizens

It had no synagogue but Jews went to the riverside where they prayed. It is here that Paul went to work.

There was an amazing cross-section of the population from the very wealthy (Lydia) to the very simple.

Lydia, a “purple” merchant was won to Christianity and offered the hospitality of her home to Paul and his friends.

Paul: Christians should be “given to hospitality” (Romans 12”13)

Peter: “Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another” (1 Peter 4:9)

A Christian home is one with an ever open door. Is ours? Do we judge others by their open door policy?

The Demented Slave Girl (16:16-24)

If Lydia came from the top end, the slave girl came from the bottom. She was what was called a Pytho, that is, a person who could give oracles to guide men about the future. She was considered “Mad” and had fallen into the hands of unscrupulous men who used her misfortune for their (financial) gain. When Paul cured her of her “madness” it took away their source of revenue. These unscrupulous played on the natural anti-Semitism of the mob and the pride of things Roman. Had Paul and Silas arrested and put in the stocks of the inner prison.

The tragic thing is that Paul and Silas were arrested and maltreated for doing good. It is characteristic of men that if their pockets are touched, they are up in arms.

Often, the greatest obstacle to the crusade of Christ is the selfishness of men.

Is the money I am earning worth the price? Do I earn it by serving or by exploiting my fellow men?

The Philippian Jailer (16:25-40)

Lydia from the top; Slave girl from the bottom; then the jailer was from the middle class which made up the Roman civil service, thus running the whole gamut of society.

Look at the *scene* of the passage: earthquakes were not uncommon here. Doors and stocks were secured by a wooden bar falling onto two slots. The jailer was about to kill himself, Roman law said if the prisoner escaped, the jailer must suffer the penalty awaiting the prisoner(s).

Look at the *characters*:

Paul:

1. He could sing hymns even in the middle of the night. The one thing you can never take away from a Christian is God and the presence of Jesus Christ.
2. He was quite willing to open the door of salvation to the jailer who had put him in the inner jail and stocks. There was never a grudge in Paul's nature.
3. He could stand on his dignity – he claimed his rights as a Roman citizen and to scourge a Roman citizen was punishable by death. He stood on his dignity not for himself but for the sake of the Christians he was leaving behind in Philippi.

The *Jailer*:

He immediately proved his conversion by his deeds, he washed the welts on their backs and set a meal before them. Unless a man's Christianity makes him kind, it is not real. Unless a man's change of heart is guaranteed by his change of deeds, it is false.

How can we apply Paul's characteristics to our own lives? Do our deeds reflect our "change of heart" and is that change for the better?

In Thessalonica (17:1-9)

The coming of Christianity to Thessalonica was an event of first importance. The great Roman road from the Adriatic Sea to the Middle East was called the Ignatian Way and the main street in

Thessalonica was part of that road. From here Christianity could spread East and West along that road to become a highway of progress of the kingdom of God. First verse: Philippi was 33 Roman miles from Amphipolis; Amphipolis was 30 miles from Apollonia; and Apollonia was 37 miles from Thessalonica. A journey of over 100 miles is dismissed in one sentence.

As usual, Paul began in the synagogue but his success was among the Gentiles attached to the synagogue. This infuriated the Jews who considered the Gentiles as their natural preserves and Paul was stealing them. First they stirred up the rabble. Then they dragged Jason and his friends before the magistrates and charged them with preaching political insurrection. Their new lie was a lie but couched it in very suggestive terms. The Jews had not the slightest doubt that Christianity was a supremely effective thing

When we talk "love for God" are we afraid of what others think or say about us? How do we respond? Fear Silence Denial?

On To Beroea (17:10-15)

Beroea was 60 miles west of Thessalonica. Three things stand out in this short section.

- 1) There is the scriptural basis of Paul's preaching — Search the scriptures.
- 2) There is the envenomed bitterness of Jews. They not only opposed Paul in Thessalonica; they pursued him to Beroea.
- 3) There is the courage of Paul. He had been imprisoned in Philippi; he had left Thessalonica in peril of his life under cover of darkness; and once again in Beroea he had had to flee for his life. Most men would have abandoned a struggle which seemed bound to end in arrest and death.

What can we do to overcome our "fears" "silence" "denial"?

Alone In Athens (17:16-21)

When Paul fled from Beroea, he found himself alone in Athens. He never stopped preaching Christ. Athens was the greatest university town in the world, to which men seeking learning came from all over the world. It was a city **of many** gods. In Athens's square people met to talk, (that's all they did) so Paul would have no difficulty in getting someone to talk to and the philosophers soon discovered him.

There were the Epicureans:

- 1) They believed that everything happened by chance.
- 2) They believed that death was the end of all.
- 3) That the gods were remote from the world and did not care.
- 4) That pleasure (not fleshly or material) was the chief end of man.
The highest pleasure was the one that brought no pain.

There were the Stoics:

- 1) They believed that everything was God. What gave men life was that a little of the "fiery spirit of God" dwelt in them and when they died it returned to God
- 2) Everything that happened was the will of God and should be accepted without resentment.
- 3) Every so often the world disintegrated in a conflagration and started all over again on the same cycle of events.

They took Paul to the Areopagus (the Greek for Mars' Hill). It was the name for both the hill and the court that met on it. The court was very select (30 members) that dealt with cases of homicide and had the oversight of public morals. There, in the most learned city in the world and before the most exclusive of courts, Paul had to state his faith. It might have daunted anyone else; but Paul was never ashamed of the gospel of Christ. To him this was another God-given opportunity to witness for Christ.

Should we not "study" our "audience" and begin to plan on their foundations? How can we do this?

A Sermon To The Philosophers (17:22-31)

Paul takes his starting point with "the Unknown God." There are a series of steps in his sermon.

- 1) God is not the made but the maker; and he who made all things cannot be worshipped by anything made by the hands of man.
- 2) God has guided history. He was behind the rise and fall of nations in the days gone by; his hand is on the helm of things now.
- 3) God has made man in such a way that instinctively he longs for God and gropes after him in the darkness.
- 4) The days of groping and ignorance are past. So long as men had to search in the shadows they could not know God and he excused their follies and their mistakes; but now in Christ the full blaze of the knowledge of God has come and the day of excuses is past.
- 5) The day of judgment is coming. Life is neither a progress to extinction, as it was to the Epicureans, nor a pathway to absorption to God, as

it was to the Stoics; it is a journey to the judgment seat of God where Jesus is Judge.

- 6) The proof of the pre-eminence of Christ is the resurrection. It is no unknown God but a Risen Christ with whom we have to deal.

Can we plan our strategy based on the beliefs and "life style" of those we want to present Christ to?

The Reactions Of The Athenians (17:32-34)

It would seem on the whole that Paul had less success in Athens. The simply wanted acrobatics and the stimulus of a mental hike. There were three main reactions:

- 1) Some mocked.
- 2) Some put off their decision.
- 3) Some Believed. The wise man knows that only the fool will reject God's offer.

Two converts are named. **Dionysius** the Areopagite (on of the 30) so he must have been one of the intellectual aristocracy of Athens. There was **Damans**. It was very unlikely that a respectable woman would have been in the market square at all. Probably she turned from a way of shame to a way of life. Once again we see the gospel making its appeal to all classes and conditions of men and women.

Do we pick and choose who we speak to about Christ by their clothes, intellectual ability, color of skin etc. etc.? What can we do to NOT restrict ourselves by these qualities?

Preaching In Corinth – The Worst Of Cities (18:1-11)

Its very location made Corinth a key city of Greece, which is cut in two by the sea. Between the two seas is a little neck of land (less than 5 miles across) where Corinth is located. All north and south traffic in Greece had to pass through Corinth because there was no other way. Men called her “The Bridge of Greece.” The voyage around the southern extremity of Greece was a voyage of great peril. As a result, the east to west trade of the Mediterranean also passed through Corinth.

Corinth was more than a great commercial center, she was the home of the Isthmian Games – second only to the Olympic Games. It was also a wicked city. “Corinthian” came to be described as one living a lustful, reckless drunk. Dominating Corinth stood the hill

of the Acropolis. It was a fortress and was the temple of Aphrodite. In its day, it had a thousand priestesses of Aphrodite who were sacred prostitutes.

This was the city in which Paul lived and worked and had some of his greatest triumphs. When he was writing to the Corinthians, he made a list of all kinds of wickedness, after which comes the triumphant phrase, “*and such were some of you*” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). The very iniquity of Corinth was the opportunity of Christ.

Impartial Roman Justice (18:12-17)

Here we have a spotlight on the kind of life Paul lived. He was a rabbi, and therefore according to Jewish practice had to have a trade. He must make his own living (“Love work”) to pay for preaching and teaching. As a result we find rabbis following every respectable trade. It meant that they never became detached scholars and always knew what the life of a working-man was like.

Paul is described as a tent maker. Tarsus was in Cilicia; where there were herds of certain goats with a special kind of Fleece. From this fleece came a cloth called *cilicium* which was used for making tents and curtains. Paul probably did not work at that trade, but the Greek work means more than a tent maker; it means a leather worker and Paul must have been a skilled craftsman. He frequently said that he was a burden to no man. When Silas and Timothy arrived, they must have brought a present from the church at Philippi, which loved Paul so much and that made it possible for him to devote his whole time to preaching. It was in 49 A.D. that Claudius banished all Jews from Rome which is when Aquila and Priscilla came to Corinth.

Just when Paul needed it, God spoke to him. Often he must have been daunted by the task that faced him in Corinth. He had intense emotions and often must have had his hours of reaction. But when God gives a man a task to do, he also gives him the power to do it. In the presence of God Paul found his courage and his strength.

Do we put our trust in God when it comes to talking about Him? Or do we rely on our own knowledge and spirituality? What can we do to correct this?

The Return To Antioch (18:18-23)

As usual the Jews sought to make trouble for Paul. At this time Gallio (who was known for his kindness) first entered into his proconsulship and the Jews attempted to get him to act against the Christians, trying to influence him before he was settled in. The Jews sought to take advantage of Gallio but he was an impartial Roman who was well aware that Paul and his friends were not guilty of any crime and that the Jews were trying to use him for their own purposes. At the side of his judgment seat were his “lectors” (guards) with their official rods and Gallio ordered them to drive the Jews from his judgment seat.

In this passage we see the indisputable value of a Christian life.

What do we do in the face of opposition? What can we do to bring ourselves to the way Paul saw his work of spreading Christianity?

The Third Missionary Journey

It began with a tour of Galatia and Phrygia to confirm the brethren there, then moved on to Ephesus where he remained for nearly three years. From there he went to Macedonia, crossed over to Troas and then proceeded by way of Miletus, Tyre and Caesarea to Jerusalem.

The Entry Of Apollos (18:24-28)

Christianity is here described as The Way of the Lord, meaning not only believing certain things but putting them into practice.

Apollos came from Alexandria where there were about a million Jews. So strong were they that two out of five wards into which Alexandria was divided were Jewish. It was the city of scholars, where they believed in the allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament, not only history but that every recorded event had an inner meaning. Because of this Apollos would be able to find Christ all over the Old Testament and to prove to them that the OT looked forward all the time to his coming.

There was a lack of training in Apollos. He knew only the baptism of John. He must have seen the need for repentance and recognized Jesus as the Messiah. By the words of Aquila and Priscilla, he was more fully instructed. As a result, Apollos, knew Jesus as a figure in history, came also to know him as a living presence and his power as a preacher must have been increased a hundredfold.

In Ephesus

Acts 19 is mainly concerned with Paul's work in Ephesus.

1. Ephesus was the market of Asia. Trade followed the river valleys and Ephesus stood at the mouth of the Cayster which commanded the richest hinterland in Asia Minor.
2. She was a town that the Roman governor came to try great cases. She knew the pomp and pageantry of Roman power and justice.
3. She was the seat of the Pan-Ionian Games which the whole country came to see.
4. She was the home of criminals. The Temple of Diana possessed the right of asylum, where the criminals came.
5. She was a centre of pagan superstition. She was famous for charms and spells called "Ephesian Letters." People came from all over the world to buy these magic parchments which they wore as amulets.
6. The greatest glory of Ephesus was the Temple of Artemis. Artemis (Greek name) and Diana (Latin name) were one and the same. The temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. 425 feet long by 220 feet wide by 60 feet high with 127 pillars, each the gift of a king.

Incomplete Christianity (19:1-7)

In Ephesus Paul met some men who were incomplete Christians. They had received the baptism of John but they did not even know of the Holy Spirit in the Christian sense of the term.

What was the difference between the baptism of John and baptism in the name of Jesus?

John's preaching was a necessary stage because there are two stages in the religious life. 1) The stage in which we see our own inadequacy and deserving of condemnation by God because we fail by relying on our own strength. 2) The stage when we come to see that through the grace of Jesus Christ our condemnation may be taken away. Closely connected to this stage is the time when we find that all our efforts to do better are strengthened by the work of the Holy Spirit, through whom we can do what we could never do ourselves. These incomplete Christians knew the condemnation and the moral duty of being better, but the grace of Christ and help of the Holy Spirit they did not know. Their religion was a thing of struggle and had not reached the stage of being a thing of peace. Even when we see the error of our ways and repent and determine to change them we

can never make the change without the help which the Spirit alone can give.

Do we recognize our own inadequacies? Do we recognize the need of the Holy Spirit? What can we do to correct both of these?

The Works Of God (19:8-12)

When work in the synagogue became impossible because of the embittered opposition, Paul changed his quarters to the hall of a philosopher called Tyrannus. One manuscript said that Paul taught in that hall from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. In the Ionian cities all work stopped at 11 a.m. and did not begin again until the late afternoon because of the heat – more people were sound asleep in Ephesus at 1 p.m. than at 1 a.m.. What Paul must have done was work all morning and evenings at his trade and teach in the midday hours. It shows us two things – the eagerness of Paul to teach and the eagerness of the Christians to learn. The only time they had was when others rested in the heat of the day. It may well same many of us when we talk of inconvenient times.

Throughout this time wonderful deeds were being done. (Sweat-bands; aprons). It is significant that the verses in Acts did not say that Paul did these extraordinary deeds; it says that God did them through Paul's hand.

Do we believe that we cannot work miracles with our hands? Do we believe without hesitation that we can give our hands to God so that He may work through them?

The Death-Blow To Superstition (19:13-20)

In those days in Ephesus, everyone believed that illness and disease, and especially mental illness, were due to evil spirits who settled in a man. Exorcism was a regular trade. If the exorcist knew the name of a powerful spirit than that which had taken up residence in the afflicted person, by speaking that name he could overpower the evil spirit and make him depart.

When some charlatans tried to use the name of Jesus, the most alarming things happened. The result was that many of the quacks, and also many of those who were sincere, saw the error of their ways. Nothing can more definitely show the reality of the change than that in superstition-ridden Ephesus they were willing to burn the

books and the charms which were so profitable to them. They are an example to us.

The Purpose Of Paul (19:21-22)

It is only by the merest hint that Luke gives us an indication here of something which is filled out in Paul's letters. He tells us that Paul intended to go to Jerusalem. He did this for two reasons:: First he wished in a practical way, to show the unity of the Church. The church in Jerusalem was poor; and Paul aimed to take a collection from all his Gentile churches as a contribution to it. He wished to demonstrate that they belonged to the body of Christ and that one part of the body suffered, all other parts must help. Second, he wished to teach them practical Christian charity. When they heard of the financial problems of Jerusalem, they felt sorry. He wished to teach them that sympathy must be translated into action. These two lessons are as valid today as ever they were.

What can we do to put these two lessons into practical action for us today?

Riot In Ephesus (19:23-41)

This story sheds a great deal of light on the characters in it.

First, there are Demetrius and the silversmiths. Their trouble was that their pockets were being touched. They were more worried about their incomes. Pilgrims coming through Ephesus like to take souvenirs home, such as the little model shrines which they made. Christianity was making such strides that their trade was threatened.

Second, there is the man who was called the "town clerk." He was more than that. He kept the public records; introduced business in the assembly; correspondence to Ephesus was addressed to him. He was concerned that a riot would start. Rome was kindly but would not stand for civil disorder. If there were riots in any town, Rome would know the reason why and the magistrates responsible might lose their positions. He saved Paul and his companions, but he saved them because he was saving his own skin.

Third, there is Paul. He wished to face that mob but they would not let him. Paul was a man without fear. For the silversmiths and the town clerk it was safety first; for Paul it was always safety **last**.

What are our thoughts and fears when we talk to crowds (especially religion).

Setting Out For Jerusalem (20:1-6)

We have seen how Paul had his heart set on making a collection from all the churches for the church of Jerusalem. This was the reason he went to Macedonia. Here again we have an instance of how much we do not know and never will know about the story of Paul. Verse 2 says when he went through those parts he came to Greece. It must have been on this occasion that he visited Illyricum (*Romans 15:19*). These few words summarize what must have been about a whole year of journey and adventure.

Verse 3 tells us that when Paul was about to set sail from Greece to Syria, a Jewish plot was unmasked and he changed his route to an overland way. Often from foreign ports Jewish pilgrim ships left for Syria taking pilgrims to the Passover and Paul must have intended to sail on one. On such a ship, fanatical Jews could easily arrange for Paul to disappear overboard and never be heard of again.

In verse 4 we have a list of Paul's companions on his voyage. These men must have been delegated from the various churches charged with the duty of taking their contributions to Jerusalem. They were demonstrating that the Church was a unity and the need of one part was the **opportunity** of the rest.

In verse 5 the narrative turns from the third person to the first person again. This is the sign that once again Luke is there and that we are getting an eye-witness account. Luke tells us that they left Philippi after the days of unleavened bread. The days of unleavened bread began with the day of the Passover and lasted for one week, during which the Jews ate unleavened bread in memory of their deliverance from Egypt. The time of the Passover was the middle of April.

What lengths can we and/or do we go through to help other members/parts of our "Body of Christ?" Can we, or should we strive to do more? Suggestions!

A Young Man Falls Asleep (20:7-12)

This story is clearly an eye-witness account; and it is one of the first accounts we have of what a Christian service was like.

It talks twice about breaking of bread. Two closely related things: One was the "Love Feast;" all contributed and it was a real meal, often the only proper meal that poor slaves got all week (Christians ate in loving fellowship with each other). The other was the Lord's Supper which was observed during or immediately after the Love

Feast; (happy togetherness of the common meal) which marked the family spirit of the Church.

It all happened at night. Probably because it was only at night, when the day's work was done, that slaves could come to the Christian fellowship. This also explains the case of Eutychus:

- It was dark
- The upper room was hot – many lamps made the air oppressive.
- He put in a long hard day of work.
- He sat by the window (no glass, wood lattice, open to get cooler air)
- Overpowered by stuffy conditions he fell asleep and fell.
- We must not take it that Paul spoke on and on; there would be talk and discussion.

From the next verses we learn that Paul did not go with the main company to make sure Eutychus was completely recovered from his fall.

Something lovely about this picture. The impression is that of a family meeting together rather than of a modern church service.

Is it possible that we have gained in dignity in our Church services at the expense of family atmosphere? What can we do to bring it back to the simple loving “family” gathering?

Stages On The Way (20:13-16)

Because Luke was with Paul we can follow the journey almost day by day and stage by stage. From Troas, Assos was 20 Miles by road, whereas it was 30 miles by sea (round Cape Lectum). Paul had ample time to make the journey by foot and be picked up at Assos. He must have wanted to be alone in order to prepare his spirit for the days ahead. (Mitylene was on the island of Lesbos, Chios was on Samos and Miletus was 28 miles south of Ephesus at the mouth of the Maeander River.)

Paul would have liked to have been in Jerusalem for the Passover and we have seen how the plot of the Jews hindered that. Pentecost came seven weeks later and he was eager to be there for that great feast. Although Paul had broken away from the Jews, the ancestral feasts were still dear to him. He was the apostle to the Gentiles but in his heart there was nothing but love for the Jews.

A Sad Farewell (20:17-38)

It is not possible to make a neat analysis of a farewell speech that is so charged with emotions as this one is. But there are certain points that speak out.

First of all Paul makes certain claims for himself:

- He had *spoken fearlessly*. He told them all God's will and did not bargain this because of fear or favor of men.
- He had *lived independently*. He supplied for his own needs and for those less fortunate than he.
- *He had faced the future gallantly*. He placed his confidence in the Holy Spirit and was able to brave anything and everything the future might hold.

Paul also urges certain claims upon his friends.

- He reminded them of *their duty*. They were overseers of the flock of God. That was not a duty they had chosen, but a duty for which they had been chosen.
- He reminded them of *their danger*. There was a constant warfare ahead to keep the faith intact and the Church pure.

No Retreat (21:1-16)

As Paul nears Jerusalem, the narrative is speeding up and there is an atmosphere of an approaching storm. Two things stand out here: (1) There is the sheer determination of Paul to go on no matter what lay ahead. Nothing could have been more definite than the warning of the disciples at Tyre and of Agabus at Caesarea, but nothing could deter Paul from the course that he had chosen. (2) There is the wonderful fact that wherever Paul went he found a Christian community waiting to welcome him. If that was true in Paul's time, it is even more true today. The man who is in the family of the Church has friends all over the world.

Agabus is an interesting figure. Jewish prophets had a certain custom, when words were inadequate, they dramatized their message.

Compromise In Jerusalem (21:17-26)

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he presented the church with a problem. The leaders accepted him and saw God's hand in his work; but rumors had been spread that he had encouraged Jews to forsake their ancestral faith. It was true that he had insisted that the Jewish Law was irrelevant for the Gentile, but he had never sought to draw the Jew away from the customs of his fathers.

The leaders suggested a way in which Paul could guarantee the orthodoxy of his own conduct. Four men were in the middle of the Nazarite vow which was a costly business. Work had to be given up and all the elements for the sacrifice had to be purchased which was beyond the means of the less fortunate, so as an act of piety a wealthy person was asked to defray the expenses of someone

taking the vow. Paul consented and by doing so all could see that he was himself an observer of the Law.

There was no doubt that this was distasteful to Paul. For him the relevancy of things like that was gone. But it is the sign of a truly great man that he can subordinate his own wishes and views for the sake of the Church. There is a time when compromise is not a sign of weakness but of strength.

A Slanderous Charge (21:27-36)

It so happened that Paul's compromise led to disaster. It was the time of Pentecost and Jews were present from all over the world in Jerusalem and certain Jew from Asia were there, who no doubt knew the effective work of Paul in Asia. They had seen him in the city with Trophimus, when they knew as a gentile. The business of the vow took Paul frequently into the Temple courts and the Asian Jews assumed that Paul had take Trophimus with him.

Gentiles could enter the Court of the Gentiles but between that court and the Court of the Women there was barrier and into that barrier there was inserted this inscription – "No man of alien race is to enter within the balustrade and fence that goes around the Temple, and if anyone is taken in the act, let him know that he has himself to blame for the penalty of death that follows." Even the Romans took this so seriously that they allowed the Jews to carry out the death penalty for this crime.

The Asian Jews then accused Paul of destroying the Law, insulting the chosen people and defiling the Temple. They instituted a movement to lynch him. At the northwest corner of the Temple area stood the Castle of Antonia (Herod the Great). At the great festivals, when the atmosphere was super charged, it housed a thousand Roman soldiers. Rome insisted on civil order and a riot was an unforgivable sin both for the populace and the commander who allowed it. For Paul's own sake he was arrested and chained by each arm to two soldiers. In the confusion the commander was able to extract no obvious charge from the excited mob and Paul was actually carried through the mob into the barracks. There was never a time when Paul was nearer death than this, and it was the impartial justice of Rome saved his life.

Facing The Fury Of The Mob (21:37-40)

The Castle of Antonia was connected to the outer courts of the Temple by two flights of stairs on the northern and the western sides. As the soldiers were struggling towards the steps to reach the sanctuary of

their own barracks, Paul made an amazing request. He asked to address the furious mob. Here is Paul exercising his consistent policy of looking the mob in the face.

The captain was amazed to hear the accents of cultured Greek coming from this man whom the crowd was out to lynch. Around 54 A.D. an Egyptian took his band of men to Mount of Olives promising he could make the walls of the city fall down before him. The Romans swiftly dealt with him and the captain thought that Paul was this revolutionary Egyptian come back.

His followers had been Dagger-bearer assassins. But when Paul stated his credentials, the captain knew that he was not a revolutionary thug. And allowed him to speak. Paul gestured for silence, and, almost miraculously, complete silence fell on that roaring mob. Nothing in all the New Testament shows the force of Paul's personality as this silence he commanded. At that moment the very power of God flowed through him.

Because most of us (if not all) do not have this charisma, do we not even try? Do we seek the direction and strength of the Holy Spirit?

The Defense Of Experience (22:1-10)

Paul's defense was not to argue, but to relate a personal experience; and a personal experience is the most unanswerable argument on earth. This defense is in essence a paradox. It stresses two things.

1. It stresses Paul's identity with the people. He was a Jew and he never forgot that. He was a man of Tarsus and Tarsus was no mean city. It was one of the great ports of the Mediterranean; it was one of the greatest university cities of the ancient world; he was a rabbi, trained by Gamaliel who had died only about five years before; he had been a persecutor in his zeal for the ancestral ways. On all these points Paul was entirely at one with the audience to which he was speaking.
2. It stresses the difference between Paul and his audience. The basic difference was that he saw Christ as the Savior of all men and God as the lover of all men. His audience saw God as the lover only of the Jews. They sought to hog the privileges of God for themselves and regarded the man who would spread them abroad as a blasphemer. The difference was that Paul had met Christ face to face.

In one sense Paul was identified with the men to whom he spoke; in another he was separated from them. It is like that with the

Christian. He lives in the world but God has separated him and consecrated him to a special task.

How do we look at others of different beliefs, color, etc.? Do we oppose them or accept them and understand our beliefs?

Paul Continues His Life Story (22:11-21)

Once again Paul is stressing his identity with his audience. When he reached Damascus, he was instructed by Ananias – a devotee of the Law whom the Jews know to be a good man. Paul is stressing the fact that he had not come to destroy the ancestral faith but to fulfill it. Here we have Luke's telescoped narratives. When we read *Acts 9* and *Galatians 1*, we find that it was really three years afterwards that Paul went up to Jerusalem, after his visit to Arabia and his witnessing in Damascus.

In *Acts 9* we were told that he left Jerusalem because he was in danger of his life; here we are told he left because of a vision. This is not a contradiction, it is the same story told from different points of view. Paul's point is that he did not want to leave the Jews. When God told him to, Paul argued. He said that his previous record would be bound to make his change all the more impressive to the Jews; but God said that the Jews would never listen to him and he must go to the Gentiles.

There is a certain wistfulness here, as with his Master, Paul's own people would not receive him (*John 1:11*).

Verse 14 is not only a summary of Paul's life but also of the Christian life. There are three items in it:

- *To know the will of God* – first aim of a Christian is to know God's will and obey it.
- *To see the Just One* – it is the aim of the Christian to daily walk in the presence of the Risen Lord.
- *To hear God's voice* – the Christian is ever listening for the voice of God above the voices of the world to tell him where to go and what to do.

How many of Paul's characteristics can we find in our own lives? What can we do to develop the ones we are lacking?

The Embittered Opposition (22:22-30)

It was the mention of the Gentiles that set off the mob again. Not that the Jews objected to the preaching to the Gentiles, what they objected

to was that the Gentiles were being offered privileges before they (the Gentiles) first accepted circumcision and the Law. If he would have preached Judaism and the Law to the Gentiles all would have been well, but he preached the grace of Christianity to them and this enraged them.

The commander did not understand Aramaic and therefore did not know what Paul had said but he did understand he must stop the riot. So he decided to examine Paul under scourging, which was not a punishment, it was the most effective way of getting the truth or a confession. Few men survived the scourging in their right senses and many died because of it. So Paul spoke and said he was a Roman citizen and therefore could not be scourged. The command was terrified, not only was Paul a citizen; he was born free, whereas the command had to purchase his freedom. The commander knew he was on the verge of doing something which would probably involve dismissal and probably his execution. So he released Paul and would send him to the Sanhedrin in order to get to the bottom of this trouble.

Paul was ready to stand on his dignity, but it was not for his own sake, he knew his task was not yet done; gladly he would one day die for Christ but he was too wise to throw his life away just yet.

Do we stand on our own dignity (talents)? Do we recognize God's power in what we do? Are we willing to die for Him?

The Strategy Of Paul (23:1-10)

There was a certain recklessness in Paul's conduct before the Sanhedrin; he acted as if he were burning his bridges behind him. To say *Brethren* was to put himself on an equal footing with the court (normal greeting would be "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel.") This is why the high priest ordered Paul to be struck. So Paul turns to him and calls him a white-washed wall. To touch a dead body was for an Israelite to incur ceremonial defilement, so they white washed the tombs so none might touch them by mistake. So in effect Paul was calling the high priest a white-washed tomb.

It was a crime to speak evil of a ruler of the people, and Paul knew perfectly well that Ananias was the high priest. But Ananias was well known as a glutton, a thief, a robber and a person that betrayed his own country by aiding the Roman enemy, with the hope of serving in the government. Then Paul made a claim that he knew would set the Sanhedrin on their ears. In the Sanhedrin there were Pharisees and Sadducees whose beliefs were often at opposite ends. The Pharisees believed in the minutiae of the oral Law; the Sadducees accepted only the written Law. The Pharisees believed in predestination; the Sadducees believed in free-will. The Pharisees believed in angels and spirits; The Sadducees did

not. Above all, the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead; the Sadducees did not.

So Paul claimed to be a Pharisee and that it was for the hope of resurrection from the dead that he was on trial. This resulted in slitting the Sanhedrin in two; and in the violent argument that followed, Paul was nearly torn to pieces. To save him from violence, the commander had to take him back to the barracks again.

Are we afraid to turn others against us for God's "greater good"?

A Plot Unmasked (23:11-24)

Here we see two things.

- 1) We see the lengths to which the Jews would go to eliminate Paul. Under certain circumstances the Jews regarded murder as justifiable. If a man was a public danger to morals and to life they regarded it as legitimate to eliminate him. Forty men put themselves under a vow called a *cherem*. These men put themselves under the ban (neither eat or drink) saying "May God curse me if I fail to do this," until they had assassinated Paul. Fortunately their plan was disclosed by Paul's nephew.
- 2) we see the lengths to which the Roman government would go in order to administer impartial justice. Paul was a prisoner and a Roman citizen and therefore the commander mobilized a small army to see him taken safely to Caesarea to be tried before Felix. It is strange how the fanatical hatred of the Jews (God's chosen people) contrasts with the impartial justice of the commander – a heathen in Jewish eyes.

Which of the two sides do we favor? What can we do (which side) to follow God's will?

The Captain's Letter (23:25-35)

The seat of Roman government was not in Jerusalem but in Caesarea where the residence of the governor (praetorium) was a palace which had been built by Herod the Great. It was 60 miles from Jerusalem to Caesarea and Antipatris was 25 miles from Caesarea. Up to Antipatris the country was dangerous and inhabited by Jews; after that the country was open and flat, quite unsuited for any ambush and inhabited by Gentiles. So at Antipatris, the main body of the troops went back and left the cavalry alone as the escort.

The governor was Felix who was born a slave. Through the influence of his brother, Pallas, (the favorite of Nero) Felix had risen to be a

freedman and then to be a governor. He was the first slave in history ever to become the governor of a Roman province. According to Tacitus, the Roman Historian, “He exercised the prerogatives of a king with the spirit of a slave.” He was completely unscrupulous and was capable of hiring thugs to murder his own closest supporters. It was to face a man like that that Paul went to Caesarea.

A Flattering Speech And A False Charge (24:1-9)

Tertullus began his speech with a passage of almost nauseating flattery, every word of which he and Felix knew was untrue. He claimed that the Jews had arrested Paul. The scene in the Temple court was closer to being a lynching than an arrest. The charge he leveled against Paul was subtly inaccurate; it fell under three headings:

- 1) Paul was a fomenter of troubles and a pest (insurrectionist), that inflamed the populace into rebellion. Tertullus knew well that the one thing that Rome would not tolerate was civil disorder, for any spark might become a flame. Tertullus knew it was a lie but it was an effective charge.
- 2) Paul was a leader of the Nazarene sect. The Romans knew what havoc false Messiahs could cause and how they could stir the people into hysterical risings that would only settle at the cost of blood. Rome could not afford to disregard a charge like that. Again Tertullus knew it was a lie but it was an effective charge.
- 3) Paul was a defiler of the Temple. To defile the Temple was to infringe the rights and laws of the priests (Sadducees) and the Romans, Tertullus hoped, would take the side of the pro-Roman party. The charge was the most dangerous of things – a series of half-truths and of twisted facts.

Paul’s Defense (24:10-21)

Beginning at the passage, “But some Jews from Asia ...” Paul’s grammar went wrong. He began to say one thing and in mid-thought changed over to another so that the sentence became quite disconnected. But its very disconnection shows vividly the excitement and tension of the scene. Paul’s defense is that of a man whose conscience is clear – it is simply to state the facts. The tragedy was that it was when he was bringing the contributions from his churches for the poor of Jerusalem and when he was meticulously observing the Jewish Law that he was arrested. One of the greatest things about Paul is that he speaks in his own defense with force and sometimes with a flash of indignation, but

never with the self-pity or bitterness that would have been so natural in a man whose finest actions had been so cruelly and deliberately misinterpreted.

How do we respond to “false” accusations about us and our faith? Do we take it “personally” and try to defend “ourselves” or do we continue to defend our Faith?

Plain Speaking To A Guilty Governor (24:22-27)

Felix was not unkind to Paul, but some of Paul’s admonitions struck terror into his heart. His wife Drusilla was the daughter of Herod Agrippa the First. She had been married to Azizus, King of Emesa. But Felix, with the help of a magician (Atomos), had seduced her from Azizus and persuaded her to marry him. It is no wonder that when Paul presented him with the high moral demands of God, he was afraid.

For two years Paul was in prison and then Felix went too far, once too often, and was recalled. There was a longstanding argument as to whether Caesarea was a Jewish or Greek city and the two were at “daggers ends.” There was an outbreak of mob violence in which the Jews came off best. Felix dispatched his troops to aid the Gentiles. Thousands

The Jews did what all Roman provincials had a right to do – report their governor to Rome. That was why Felix left Paul in prison, even though he was well aware that he should be freed. He was trying to gain favor with the Jews to no avail. He was dismissed from his post and only the influence of his brother Pallas saved him from execution.

Do we give in to the crowd or do we stand our ground? How do we face adversity and change? What should/could we do to stand by our love for God?

I Appeal To Caesar (25:1-12)

Festus was a different type from Felix; we don’t know a lot about him but what we do know proves that he was a just and upright man. He died after only two years in office. The Jews tried to take advantage of him (like they did of Felix); they tried to persuade him to send for Paul to come to Jerusalem; for once again they had formed a plot to assassinate him on the way. But Festus was a Roman, with the Roman instinct for justice; and he told them to come to Caesarea and plead their case there. From Paul’s answer we can deduce the malicious charges which they leveled against

him. They accused him of heresy, of sacrilege and of sedition. From third points of view the first charge maybe was true, irrelevant as it was to Roman law; but the second two were deliberate lies.

Festus had no desire to get up against the Jews in the first days of his governorship and he offered a compromise. Was Paul prepared to go to Jerusalem and stand his trial there while he stood by to see fair play? But Paul know that for him there could be no such thing as fair play at Jerusalem and he took his great decision. If a Roman citizen felt he was not getting justice in a provincial court, he could appeal direct to the Emperor. Only if the man was a murderer, a pirate, or a bandit caught in the act, was the appeal invalid. In all other cases the local procedure had to be honored and the claimant had to be dispatched to Rome. When Paul uttered the fateful words, "I appeal to Caesar," Festus had no choice; and so Paul, in very different circumstances from those of which he had dreamed, had set his foot upon the first step of the road that led to Rome.

When we are "falsely" accused, do we appeal "to a higher power?" Who or what is that higher power?

Festus And Agrippa (25:13-21)

Agrippa was still king of a small part of Palestine, which included Galilee and Peraea; but he knew quite well that he held even that limited realm by grace of the Romans. They had put him there and they could just as easily remove him. It was therefore his custom to pay a courtesy visit to the Roman governor when he entered his province. Bernice was a sister of Drusilla, the wife of Felix, and she was also a sister of Agrippa himself. Festus, knowing that Agrippa had intimate knowledge of Jewish faith and practice, proposed to discuss Paul's case with him. He gave Agrippa an impartial review of the situation as it existed at that moment; and now the stage was set for Paul to plead his case and bear his witness before a king. Jesus had said, "You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake" (*Matthew 10:18*). The prophecy had come true; but the promise of help (*Matthew 10:19*) was also to come true.

How much "faith" do have in what God says to us? Do we rely on Him or ourselves? His power or our cababilities.

Festus Seeks Material For His Report (25:22-27)

Festus got himself into a difficult situation. It was Roman law that if a man appealed to Caesar and was sent to Rome, there must be sent with him a written account of the case and of the charges against him. Festus' problem was that, as far as he could see, there was no charge to send. That is why this meeting had to be convened.

There is no more dramatic scene in all the New Testament. It was with pomp that Agrippa and Bernice had come. They would have on their purple robes of royalty and the gold circlet of the crown on their brows. For sure, Festus had donned the scarlet robe which a governor wore on state occasions. Close at hand there must have stood Agrippa's counselors and also the most influential figures of the Jews. Close by Festus stood the captains in command of the five cohorts which were stationed at Caesarea; and in the background there would be a solid phalanx of the tall Roman legionaries in ceremonial guard.

Into such a scene came Paul, the little Jewish tent-maker, with his hands in chains; and yet from the moment he speaks, it is Paul who holds center stage. When a man has Christ in his heart and God at his right hand, he has the secret of power. Of whom then shall he be afraid?

<p>What does this tell us to do, to feel, to think, to say? How do we picture ourselves before our adversaries?</p>
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The Defense Of A Changed Man (26:1-11)

One of the extraordinary things about the great characters in the New Testament story is that they were not afraid to confess what once they had been. Here in the presence of the king, Paul frankly confesses that there was a day when he had tried to blast the Christians out of existence.

In the early days of an evangelist called Brownlow North, lived a life that was anything but Christian. Once, just before he was to enter the pulpit in his church, he received a letter. This letter informed him that its writer had evidence of some disgraceful thing which Brownlow had done before he became a Christian; and it went on to say that the writer proposed to interrupt the service and to tell the whole congregation of that sin if he preached. Brownlow took the letter into the pulpit; he read it to the congregation; he told of the thing that once he had done; and then told them that Christ had changed him and that Christ could do the same for them. He used the very evidence of his shame to turn it to the glory of Christ.

The great Christians have never been afraid to point to themselves as living examples of the power of Christ. It is true that a man can never change himself; but it is also true that what he cannot do, Christ can do for him.

In this passage Paul insists that the center of his whole message is the resurrection. His witness is not of someone who has lived and died, but of One who is gloriously present and alive for evermore. For Paul every day is Easter Day.

**Do we admit our own “faults” and “failures” (sins)?
Can/do we see each day of our lives as “Easter?”**

Surrender For Service (26:12-18)

This passage is full of interest.

- The Greek word *apostolos* literally means, *one who is sent faith*. An ambassador is an *apostolos* or *apostle*. Therefore an emissary of the Sanhedrin was technically know as and *apostolos* of the Sanhedrin. That means that Paul began this journey as the apostle of the Sanhedrin and ended it as the apostle of Christ.
- Paul was pressing on with his journey at midday. Unless a traveler was in a big hurry, he rested during the midday heat. So we see how Paul was driving himself on this mission of persecution. Beyond a doubt he was trying by extreme action to still the doubts that were in his heart.
- The Risen Christ told Paul that it was hard for him to kick against the spikes. When a young ox was first yoked it tried to kick its way out. If it was yoked to a one handed plow, the plowman held in his other hand a long staff with a sharpened end which he held close to the ox's heels so that every time it kicked it was struck with the staff. The young ox had to learn submission the hard way and so had Paul.

Verses 17 and 18 give a perfect summary of what Christ does for men.

- a) *He opens their eyes*. When Christ comes into a man's life, He enables him to see things he never saw before.
- b) *He turns them from the darkness to the light*. Before a man meets Christ it is as if he were facing the wrong way; after meeting Christ he is walking towards the light and his way clear before him.
- c) *He transfers him from the power of Satan to the power of God*. Once evil had him in its grasp, now God's triumphant power enables him to live in victorious goodness.

- d) *He gives him forgiveness of sins and a share with the sanctified.* For the past, the penalty of sin is broken, for the future, life is recreated and purified.

Do we remember some “darkness” of our past? Has Christ “turned us around” to see the light? Do we recognize His “conversion” of us and do we give Him credit?

A Task Accepted (26:19-23)

Here we have a vivid summary of the substance of the message which Paul preached.

- a) He called on men to **repent** (change one’s mind). To repent means to realize that the kind of life we are living is wrong and that we must adopt a completely new set of values, which involves two things: 1) sorrow for what we have been, and 2) the resolve that by the grace of God we will be changed.
- b) He called on men **to turn to God**. It may be in thoughtless disregard; it may be because we have deliberately gone to the far countries of the soul. But Paul calls on us to let the God who was nothing to us become the God who is everything to us.

He called on men **to do deeds to match their repentance**. The proof of genuine repentance and turning to God is a certain kind of life. But these deeds are not merely the reaction of someone whose life is governed by a new series of *laws*; they are the result of a new *love*. The man who has come to know the love of God in Jesus Christ knows now that if he sins he does not only break God’s law, he breaks God’s heart.

Where do we stand in that “repentance?” Where do we stand (percentage wise) in recognizing God’s conversion of us and His laws and love?

A King Impressed (26:24-31)

It is not so much what is actually said in this passage which is interesting as the **ATMOSPHERE** which the reader can feel begin it. Paul was a prisoner. He was wearing his fetters, as he makes clear. And yet the impression given is that he is the dominating personality in the scene. Festus does not speak to him as a criminal. He knew Paul’s record as a trained rabbi; he had seen Paul’s room scattered with the scrolls and parchments which were the earliest Christian books. Agrippa, listening to Paul, is more on trial than Paul is. And the end of the matter is that a rather bewildered company cannot see any real reason why Paul should be tried in Rome or anywhere

else. Paul has in him a power which raises him head and shoulders above all others in any company. The man who has the Risen Christ at his side need fear no one.

Fourth and Final Missionary Journey to Rome

The Last Journey Begins (27:1-8)

Paul has embarked upon his last journey. Two things must have lifted up his heart. 1) One was the kindness of a stranger, for all through the voyage Julius, the Roman centurion, treated Paul with kindness and consideration which were more than mere courtesy. He is said to have belonged to the Augustan Cohort – a special corps acting as liaison officers between the Emperor and the provinces. Julius must have been a man of long experience and with an excellent military record. It may well be that one brave man recognized another. 2) The other uplifting thing was the devotion of Aristarchus. Aristarchus could have accompanied Paul on this last journey only by enrolling himself as Paul's slave which he chose to do rather than be separated from him – and loyalty can't go any further than that.

The voyage began by coasting up to Sidon, From there, the next port was Myra but things were difficult because the prevailing wind at that time of year was the west wind and they could make Myra only by slipping under Cyprus and then crisscrossing (tacking) up the coast. At Myra they found a ship from Alexandria bound for Rome (a corn ship – Egypt was the granary of Italy). Look at the map and see what a long way around she had to take; but the strong west winds made the direct journey impossible. After many days of beating against the wind she slipped under the lee of Crete and came to a little port called Fair Havens.

Do we give up when the “road gets rough” for us? What should we do to have the courage to continue?

In Peril On The Sea (27:9-20)

It is obvious that Paul was the most experienced traveler on board that ship. The Fast referred to is the Jewish Day of Atonement and on that year it fell in the first half of October. According to the navigational practice of the time, sailing was considered doubtful after September and impossible by November. Remember that the ancient ships had neither sextant nor compass and in cloudy and dark weather they had no means of finding their way. It was Paul's advice that they should winter where they were in Fair Havens.

Remember, the ship was an Alexandrian corn ship and the owner would rather be the contractor who was bringing the cargo of corn to Rome. The centurion, being the senior officer on board, had the last word. It is significant that Paul, the prisoner under arrest, was allowed his say when counsel was being taken. But Fair Havens was not a very good harbor and it had a small town where the winter days might be passed by the crew; so the centurion rejected Paul's advice and took the advice of the contractor to sail farther along the coast to Phoenix where there was a more accommodation harbor and a bigger town.

An unexpected south wind made the plan seem easy; and then shifted to a terrible wind from the north east. It was a gale and the danger was that they could not control the ship and would inevitably be blown on the Syrtis Sands off North Africa (a graveyard of many ships). By this time they had managed to get the dinghy (being towed behind) aboard. They began to throw out all spare gear to lighten the ship. With stars and sun shut out, they did not know where they were and they began to abandon hope.

Be Of Good Cheer (27:21-26)

The ship was by this time in desperate peril. These corn ships were not small (140 feet by 36 feet with a 33 foot draught). In a storm they had severe disadvantages. They had no rudder like a modern ship but were steered with two great paddles coming out from the stern on each side making them hard to manage. They had only one mast with one great square sail, (linen or stitched hides) making it impossible to sail into the wind. Worst of all, the single mast and great sail put a strain on the ship's timbers in a gale that could cause it to founder. To avoid this they frapped the ship. That means that they passed hawsers under the ship and drew them tight with their winches to hold the ship together like a tied up parcel.

Then an amazing thing happened, Paul took command; the prisoner became the captain, for he was the only man with any courage left. The man of God is the man whose courage stands when terror invades the hearts of others.

Do we have the same courage as Paul? What should we do when things seem hopeless – fear sets in?

Hoping For The Day (27:27-38)

They had lost all control of the ship, it was drifting broadside across the Adriatic. They heard the crash of breakers on some distant shore. They cast out anchors from the stern to slow the drifting speed to

prevent being cast on the rocks they heard but could not see. The sailors planned to sail away in the dinghy which would have left the 276 people to perish. Paul took the action of a commander which frustrated their plan. The ship's company must sink or swim together. Next comes a most human and suggestive episode. Paul insisted that they should eat. He was a visionary man of God as well as an intensely practical man. He never doubted that God would do His part but he also know that they must do theirs. He knew that hungry men are not efficient men, so he gathered the ship's company around and made them eat.

As we read this passage, into the storm there seems to come a strange calm. Paul has somehow made others sure that God is in charge of things. The most useful people in the world are those who, being themselves calm, bring to others the secret of confidence. Paul was like that and every follower of Jesus ought to be steadfast when others are in turmoil.

How much confidence do we give to God? How much do we rely on our own capabilities? Do we “pray” as if all is on God and “act” as if all is up to me?

Welcome At Malta (28:1-6)

Paul and the ship's company ended up on the island of Malta. The Authorized Version calls them *barbarous* people. Greek calls them *barbaroi* (a man who said *bar-bar* - unintelligible foreign language rather than the beautiful Greek language). A better translation would be to call them *natives*.

This passage sheds little highlights of Paul's character. He could not bear to be doing nothing – he gathered firewood to keep the bonfire going, showing he was not ashamed to be useful in the smallest things.

Also we see Paul as a man cool and unexcited. In one of the bundles of firewood as a poisonous snake which being awakened by the heat fastened itself to his hand. We don't know if this was a miracle or not. Nowadays there is no such thing as a poisonous snake in Malta, and in Paul's time there was a snake very like a viper but quite harmless. It is far more likely that Paul shook off the snake before it had time to pierce his skin. Paul seemed to handle the affair as if it was of little account. It certainly looked to the Maltese like a miracle but Paul was a man who did not fuss.

Do we do menial tasks or are we too good to do them?

Help And Healing (28:7-10)

The Chief on the island of Malta was a “title” and Publius could well have been the chief Roman representative for that part of the island. His father was ill and Paul was able to exercise his healing gift and bring him relief. In verse 9 it says that the rest of the people who had ailments came and *were healed*. The word used is the word for *receiving medical attention*; and some think that this can well mean, not only that they came to Paul, but that they came to Luke who gave them his medical skills. If that be so, this passage gives us the earliest picture of a *medical missionary*. There is an interesting thing here. Paul could exercise the give of healing; and yet he himself had always to bear with him the thorn in the flesh. Many men have brought to others a gift which was denied to him. Beethoven for example gave the world beautiful music, yet was stone-deaf, so he never heard his own music. It is one of the wonders of grace that such men did not grow bitter but were content to be the channels of blessings which they themselves could never enjoy.

Do we rely on God’s healing power alone, or man’s healing power alone? Or do we work as if it is up to us AND pray as if it is up to God?

So We Came To Rome (28:11-15)

After three months, Paul and the ship’s company managed to get passages for Italy on another corn ship which had wintered in Malta. In those days ships had figure-heads (The Heavenly Twins – Castor and Pollux). This time the voyage was as prosperous as the previous one had been disastrous.

Puteoli was the port of Rome, and Paul must have had “butterflies” in his heart for now he was on the very threshold of the capital of the world. How would a little Jewish tentmaker fare in the greatest city in the world? To the north lay the port of Misenum where the Roman fleets were stationed; and as he saw the warships in the distance Paul must have thought of the might of Rome. Nearby were the beaches of Baiae which was the “Brighton of Italy,” with its crowded beaches and the colored sails of the yachts of the wealthy Romans. Puteoli, with its wharves and its store-houses and its ships, has been called the “Liverpool” of the ancient world.”

There must have been a catch at Paul’s heart as he faced Rome almost alone. Then something wonderful happened. Appii Forum is 43 miles from Rome and the Three Taverns, 33. They were on the

great Appian Way which led from Rome to the coast. And a group of Roman Christians came to meet him. The Greek word used is that used for a city deputation going to meet a general or a king or a conqueror. They came to meet Paul as one of the great ones of the earth; and he thanked God and took courage. What was it that so specially lifted up his heart? Surely it was the sudden realization that he was far from being alone.

The Christian is never alone.

- He has the awareness of the unseen cloud of witnesses around him and about him.
- He has the awareness of belonging to a world-wide fellowship.
- He has the consciousness that wherever he goes, there is God.
- He has the certainty that his Risen Lord is with him.

Have we ever felt “we are alone?” What has turned that around to realize “we are NOT alone?”

Unsympathetic Jews (28:16-29)

There is something infinitely wonderful in the fact that to the end of the day, wherever Paul went, he began with the Jews. For more than thirty years they had been doing everything they could to hinder him, to undo his work, and even to kill him: and still it is to them first that Paul offers his message. Is there any example of undefeatable hope and unconquerable love like this act of Paul when, in Rome too, he preached first to the Jews?

In the end he comes to a conclusion, implied in his quotation from Isaiah. It is that this too is the work of God; this rejection of Jesus by the Jews is the very thing which has opened the door to the Gentiles. There is a purpose in everything; on the helm of this is the hand of the unseen steersman – God. The door which the Jews shut was the door that opened to the Gentiles; and even that is not the end, because some time, at the end of the day, there will be one flock and one shepherd.

Have we given up when our attempt at evangelization seems to fail? What must we do when that “failure” stops us?

Freedom To Preach (28:30-31)

To the end, Paul is Paul. The Authorized Version obscures a point. It says that for two years he lived in his own hired house. The real meaning is that he lived at his own expense, that he earned his own living. Even in prison his own two hands supplied his need; and he was not idle otherwise. It was there in prison that he wrote the letter to the Philippians, to the Ephesians, to the Colossians and to Philemon. Nor was he ever altogether alone. Luke and Aristarchus had come with him and to the end Luke remained (2 Timothy 4:11); Timothy was often with him (Philippians 1:1); Sometimes Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21) was with him; and sometimes Mark was with him (Colossians 4:10).

Nor was it wasted time. He tells the Philippians that all this was fallen out to the furtherance of the gospel. That was particularly so because his bonds were known throughout all the Praetorian Guard. He was in his own private lodging but night and day a soldier was with him. These soldiers were members of the picked troops of the Emperor. In two years many of them must have spent long days and nights with Paul; and many must have gone from his guard duty with Christ in his heart.

And so the Book of Acts comes to an end with a shout of triumph. In the Greek *without let or hindrance* are one word and it falls like a victor's cry. It is the peak of Luke's story. We wonder why Luke never told us what happened to Paul, whether he was executed or released. The reason is that this was not Luke's purpose. At the beginning of acts, Luke gave us his scheme of Acts when he told how Jesus commanded his followers to bear witness for him in Jerusalem and all over Judaea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Now the tale is finished; the story that began in Jerusalem rather more than thirty years ago has finished in Rome. It is nothing less than a miracle of God. The Church which in its beginnings could be numbered in hundreds cannot now be numbered in tens of thousands. The story of the crucified man of Nazareth has swept across the world in its conquering course until now without interference it is being preached in Rome, the capital of the world. The gospel has reached the center of the world and is being freely proclaimed – and Luke's task is at an end.

<p>This outline is taken from <i>The Daily Study Bible Series</i> of the <i>Acts of the Apostles</i> Revised Edition by William Barclay; Westminster Press, 1976</p>
