



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 28:1–16

“And So We Came to Rome”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Acts chapter 28, verse 1 through verse 16, for the Scripture reading today. We have reached the final chapter of our study of the Acts of the apostles, and the subject for today is “And So We Came to Rome,” and we’re going to read the apostle’s encounter with the viper on the island of Malta, and then the last lap by which the apostle reaches the great city of Rome. So will you follow now with me as I read verse 1 through verse 16, of this last chapter.

For the sake of a few of you who may not have been here previously. Chapter 27 has recorded the apostle’s trip by ship from Caesarea, through the shipwreck near the island of Malta, and the apostle and others in the boat have escaped safe to the land of that island, called also Melita, but this is the island that we know as Malta.

“And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness, for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.”

Incidentally, when Paul calls these people “barbarous people” or in verse 4, “barbarians,” he doesn’t mean that they were barbarians in the sense in which we use the word today. That’s probably evident from the way in which they treated the apostle and those that were with him. It means that

they were individuals who did not speak the Greek language. And so *barbaroi* or the word from which we get “barbarians” meant essentially that. They are barbarous in the sense, that their language surprisingly was a Semitic language, and they did not speak, therefore, Greek.

Verse 3: “And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat and fastened on his hand.”

Now, a number of the New Testament scholars have commented upon the fact, that from what we know of the island of Malta today, there are no poisonous snakes on the island, and so some have suggested that this was an event that was invented by Luke, in order to get over what he thought was a spiritual lesson. But then we should remember it's been nineteen hundred years since the apostle was there and, furthermore, the island of Malta today is a very densely populated island, twelve hundred people per square mile, which is rather dense. As a matter of fact, the reason they do not have many snakes on the island, is there are so many people there. Now, I won't make any facetious comments about that. I'm sure there are some snakes among the people but, nevertheless, so far as poisonous snakes are concerned, I think, you can see why there are no poisonous snakes there today. There is ever, every evidence from the incidental remarks that Luke makes through here, that he's giving us an eyewitness account of things that truly happened.

“And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, ‘No doubt, this man is a murderer whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.’”

It's likely that, that word “vengeance” should be capitalized, because it is, it seems, most likely a reference to a god named “Vengeance.”

“And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit, they looked when he should have swollen or fallen down dead suddenly, but after they had looked a great while and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god. In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island.”

Now, that too is an interesting thing, because normally to call the person who was the leading figure in the island, you would not normally hit upon this particular terminology; the “first man” of the island or the “chief man” of the island. But inscriptions have been discovered on the island of Malta which confirm the historicity of this particular phrase as a reference to the leader on the island. In that sense, the authenticity of the account has been supported by the discovery.

“So we have a man by the name of Publius, who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever, and of a bloody flux or dysentery.”

One of the physicians who was listening to the message this morning, came up and informed me that this was cholera.

“To whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him and healed him. So when this was done, others also which had diseases in the island came and were healed. Who also honored us with many honors, and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary. And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.”

You remember too, that I mentioned previously, that in the exposition of chapter 27, that the time to sail on the Mediterranean Sea was the summer time or the spring and summer time, up to

around the middle of September or so, and from about the middle of September, or the fifth or tenth, I've forgotten the exact day, until about October the seventeenth, it was dangerous to sail, and then after that it was impossible. And you can see evidence of that here also, because this ship had wintered in the island, and Paul mentions three months, so this is now long about February, the latter part, or middle or latter part of February that things in the Mediterranean became calmer, and it was possible for them to move. And so Paul got into a ship, “whose sign was Castor and Pollux.

“And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days.” They're making their way to Italy.
“And from thence we fetched a compass.”

That word probably is not translated in your version, if you have a modern version, in that way, “we fetched a compass.” There is a problem of the precise text at this point, and the text, for example, that I read, the Greek text, at this place has a word that probably means “to cast loose”; that is “to cast loose an anchor.” So probably that's the force.

“From thence we cast loose the anchors and came to Rhegium, and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli” or Puteoli “where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days, and so we went on the way to Rome. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and the Three Taverns, whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage. And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard, but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.”

Now, that would indicate that the apostle was regarded rather highly, and it was not thought that he would make serious attempts to escape, and so every night he would be chained to one of the

Roman guards, and he would spend his life that way. As we shall see in the last of our studies, the apostle did have a relative amount of freedom, which was granted to him until his case came to trial.

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word, and let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, again we turn to Thee with thanksgiving and praise for the privilege of proclaiming the Word of God. We thank Thee for the way in which it ministers to us, for the power that it exhibits when the Holy Spirit uses it in our lives. We're grateful, Lord, for all that Thou hast done for us through the Scriptures, and we pray today as the Word of God is preached, not only in Believers Chapel, but in other places as well, that it may be attended by Thy blessing. We know, Lord, that many shall come under the sound of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and today through the Holy Spirit, bring conviction and conversion. And for us Lord, as we think about the things of the Spirit, may the Holy Spirit give us insight into our own condition before Thee, and give us submission to the teaching of Holy Scripture, and in places, Lord, where we need to respond to the teaching in a change of our lives. We pray that motivation and enablement may result in further submission to Thee.

We especially give Thee thanks today for the Lord Jesus Christ who has loved us, and who has given himself for us. We thank Thee for the imputation of divine righteousness through faith in Christ; that remarkable act of our great triune God, by which we who are sinners are declared righteous. We give Thee thanks, for we are surely most unworthy of Thy blessing. We pray too, Lord, that Thy hand of blessing may be upon the whole Church of Jesus Christ, and, especially, do we ask Thy blessing upon Believers Chapel: its elders, its deacons, its members. And friends and the visitors who are here this morning in this auditorium, we ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon this entire body. May together we grow in grace today. We pray for the sick. For those who are unable to be with us for that reason, we ask Thy blessing upon them. May they be strengthened and encouraged, and may healing be given. We know there are many who are suffering trials and difficulties.

Encourage them too, Lord. Now we ask Thy blessing upon us as we sing, as we listen to the Word, and as our hearts by Thy grace are turned toward Thee.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] One of the most significant things that Luke has said in this particular book, his second book, is the statement that he made with which he began it. “The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.” Now, it has been almost universally noticed by those who read and ponder the book of Acts that when the author of the book said that his first book, the Gospel of Luke, was about things that Jesus began both to do and teach, and we are to regard this book as the things that Jesus has continued to do and teach. In other words, when Luke wrote the book of Acts, he didn't really think that he was writing another book, in the sense in which we would speak of a second book. He more likely was thinking of the second volume of one work, and Acts is the second volume of the things that Jesus does and teaches. There are many things that have confirmed that as we have read through the book of the Acts, because when the apostle was called to the ministry to the Gentiles he was told that he was to be such a minister of the gospel to the Gentiles, and he was to say the things that the Lord was saying to him in his call. But he was also to say the things that would come to him in the additional appearances that the Lord Jesus would make to him. So from time to time, and we have a record of a few of those times in the book of Acts, the Lord appeared to the apostle and gave him further things that he was to say. In other words, the book of the Acts is the continuation of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ; continuation of course, in a slightly different way.

So we are nearing the end of the Acts of the apostle, but not the end of the acts of the Holy Spirit who works at the beck and call of the Lord Jesus Christ. As James Denney said in a statement I repeated last week, “The New Testament preaches a Christ, who was dead and is alive, not a Christ who was alive and is dead.” Now, there's a sense in which that's true, but we cannot go stop with that, and remember, when John the apostle received his vision of the Lord in Revelation chapter 1,

and heard from our Lord he said, that is, the Lord spoke to his apostle, “I am he that liveth and was dead.” But then he adds, “And behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades.” So the New Testament sets forth a Lord who was alive and who did die, but who is alive forevermore. And we should not think of the Lord Jesus as an individual who lived a long time ago and who died. In fact, when we turn to the latter part of the book of Acts, we notice another interesting thing. At least I think it’s interesting. The first part of the book has to do primarily with Peter and the influence and activities that he exercised in those early days of the Christian church, but from Acts chapter 13 on, the major figure is the Apostle Paul.

Now, he has learned a tremendous truth, and that truth is evident from the story of Paul’s life as it appears in Acts. It’s the truth that the Lord Jesus is still alive, and that he’s ministering a living Lord, and not one who died a long time ago and does not have any living influence upon him.

Some years ago, in fact it’s many years ago now, I read a comment by a leading Bible teacher of another generation. He went on to ask the question of the meaning of our Lord’s appearances to the apostles after his death. And he made the striking comment, at least, it was striking to me, that one of the things that our Lord indicated by his appearances to the apostles, was not simply the fact that he was alive, but he wanted to emphasize that fact by his vanishings. In other words, those appearances are to be looked at as vanishings of the Lord. Now, he went on to illustrate it by, for example, he appeared to them in the Upper Room, he came when there were no open doors, he came through the doors, and there was a communion between them, and then he vanished. And then on the Damascus Road he came along side the individuals who were on their way, Damascus Road, I meant the, the Emmaus Road, and as they were along the Emmaus Road, they were talking the Lord Jesus did not reveal who he was. And they entered into the house, remember, and as he took the bread, then they recognized him. He appeared to them, but then he vanished. And he went on to make the point that one of the chief things the Lord wanted to indicate, was that by his vanishings he was really alive, and they were to reflect upon the fact that their life was lived with the Lord Jesus always at hand and that those vanishings suggested that.

Well, it's a very illuminating thought, I think, and it's reflected in other things in the New Testament. As I mentioned in my prayer, not intending to preach by it, but the thought occurred to me as I was praying, that in the first chapter of Revelation, and in the second chapter of the book of Revelation, the Lord Jesus is said to be one who moves among the candlesticks. And the candlesticks are identified as being the local churches. So he is one who is constantly living and moving in the local church. And, I think, it's important that we should realize that in the life of the local church, we are not ministering, we are not acting, we are not living with a Lord who lived a long time ago and died and is no longer with us. He is with us. As a matter of fact, he's with us in this meeting, and we should regard him as present. We should realize that those vanishings were intended to tell us that he is still with us, and that I consider, at least to me, to be one of the most important facts of the New Testament revelation after the Gospels. In other words, the Lord Jesus was gone in the sense, that he'd appeared to them before in that physical sense, but not gone as far as his spiritual presence was concerned, and they were not forgotten.

You might have thought the apostles would be very discouraged when the Lord left, and no doubt they were. There's evidence of it from the Gospels themselves, and I'm sure, that as people came along later on, they would have said, “Wouldn't it have been nice to have been there with the apostles in those early days? Our faith would be so much stronger.” No, as a matter of fact, the Lord Jesus said, “It's expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Holy Spirit will not come to you.” For you see, in those days, only those who were in the physical presence of our Lord could have enjoyed the blessing of it, but now through the Holy Spirit, all of us have his continuous presence. That's so important for reflecting upon the experiences of the Christian life.

Now, in the apostle's life and ministry one senses that, that's really the secret of the activity of the Apostle Paul. And I dare say that if we can, by God's grace, come to the conviction that we are living in the presence of the Lord always, and we have him at our right hand always, our lives are going to be quite a bit different, and far more spiritually fruitful.

Now, this is a passage that I suppose, if anyone were looking for passages to preach, he would rarely choose, because it isn't the kind of passage that's striking. It doesn't have any great revelation concerning the person or work of our Lord but, nevertheless, it's part of the Word of God, and there are some lessons that the Holy Spirit evidently has thought would be useful for us. So we'll take a look at the three parts of it; the apostle's experience with the viper, and then with Publius' father, and finally, the last few points on the way to the city of Rome.

Luke begins the chapter by saying that after they had escaped from the shipwreck and come to the island, they discovered that it was Malta. Now, those of us who are anywhere near my age will remember that Malta was rather important in World War II because it was one of the most bombed places in World War II, and associated with it was a man by the name of General Dobie. In fact, General Dobie became the consul general of that island, which was a British protectorate for so long, until in the sixties it became independent. General Dobie was a very unusual man. He was not only a Christian man, but he was a vital Christian man. He taught Bible classes, and was a tower of inspiration to the people on the island of Malta. So whenever I think about Malta, I think about General Dobie who had such a remarkably faithful Christian testimony.

Well, they came to the island of Malta, and these “barbarous” people, to use the Authorized Version's rendering, showed the apostle, and the two hundred and seventy-five or so that were with him, “no little kindness.” In fact, the Greek text says, “the kindness that you don't meet with often,” and thus, unusual kindness. “For they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.” After all, remember, it's probably in February or around that time. Very cold, and they were wet. They had had a very bad experience. And then notice the apostle. The apostle enters into this. He goes out and gathers sticks himself, so Paul the practical, Paul the unexcitable. He enters into it, and you just imagine the apostle going out picking up sticks in order to have a fire. You think the apostle of Jesus Christ doing things like that. Yes, that was not above the apostle. He, evidently, was not too used to doing this because he happened to pick up a hibernating viper at the same time, and this animal was rather stiff, because it probably hadn't moved for about

two months. And so when the apostle brought his little pile of sticks over to the fire to throw them on, the viper realizing that winter is just about over, feeling a little bit of the warmth, suddenly came alive, and attached himself to the apostle, which shows a great deal of spiritual insight, but nevertheless, the apostle didn't appreciate it, and the barbarians were puzzled by it too. So stiff after the winter's nap, he fastens on to the apostle's hand, and the barbarians were astonished of course, and disturbed, because when they saw the venomous beast hang on his hand they said among themselves, they give the same kind of interpretation that we so often do, “If things bad happen to you, you must have sinned in some way.”

If you read “Peanuts,” you know that's the favorite theological opinion of Lucy, and some of the others of the strip. If something bad happens, you've done something wrong. So when they see the beast hanging on the apostle they say, “He escaped the sea, which was probably meant for his judgment, but he cannot escape the god Vengeance. Be sure your sin will find you out,” they would have put in their own language, and they say, “Here is a man who is probably a murderer.” It illustrates the fact, that so often we make judgments which are really not accurate at all. So often we make judgments in the Christian church too.

I heard of a preacher one time who spoke about the fact, that he had heard some things that were bad about him, so he got up in front of the church and complained about it. He said that there was a rumor going about that his wife had attended a meeting of some heretical group, and that he had gone there in great indignation, and had dragged her out by the hair of her head, and brought her home and beat her. So he thought he should have something to say to the congregation about it. He said, “First of all, he had not dragged his wife out of the meeting, and secondly, he had not dragged her out by her hair and beaten her. As a matter of fact, his wife had never attended the meeting. And finally,” he said, “I'm a bachelor, and I've never had a wife.”

Some years ago I was attending a meeting, and John Phillips, who is with Moody Bible Institute, was one of the other speakers, and he was introduced by the master of ceremonies, it was in Calgary, Alberta, and he was introduced by the master of ceremonies with a rather flowery

introduction. And so John got up and he said, “That reminds me of a man introduced as a man who made a million dollars in Texas in oil.” He said, “The fellow got up and he said; I’ll have to make a few corrections. It wasn’t oil. It was coal. And it wasn’t Texas. It was Pennsylvania. And, furthermore, it wasn’t a million. It was a hundred thousand. And it wasn’t made. It was lost. And it wasn’t me. It was my brother.” So it’s very easy for us to get false impressions of things, and the inhabitants of the island, they looked and they said, “This fellow’s a murderer. It’s obvious, and Vengeance is not going to suffer him to live.”

Well, the apostle had the little viper on his hand, and he just shook him off and shook him off into the fire, and they all stood around, and watched Paul to see if his hand would swell up, or if he would suddenly keel over dead. Well, if it was a very venomous beast, I imagine that either of those things too could have happened, but as they looked at the apostle, nothing happened. And so, finally, they changed their opinion. They say, “No, he’s not a murderer who’s managed to escape a storm, and now justice is going to take over and see that he die for his sins. He’s really a god.” Well, it illustrates also the fact, how easy it is for the mob to change their minds. Oh, the fickleness of the mobs. He’s a murderer, and then he’s a god. Well, those are illustrations of things, I think, that are very important for us.

Well, Paul goes on now to have a ministry toward Publius’ father, and we read of this in verse 7 through verse 10. The chief man of the island, who was the ruler evidently of the land, had some lands nearby. That seems to be the meaning of, “in the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island.” His name was Publius, and evidently, a very, very hospitable man. Someone has said, “Social tact is making people feel at home when you wish they were there.” Well, Publius was an individual who treated the apostle and others very courteously. He took care of them. And Luke goes on to say, he said, had a father who “was sick of a fever and of a bloody flux.” And as I mentioned to you, one of the physicians who was here this morning at eight thirty came to me and said, “The illness that he had, the fever and the dysentery,” incidentally, the Greek text the word is *dissentar*. That is the word from which we get the English word “dysentery” is probably a reference to

cholera. At any rate, it's a very serious disease, and ordinarily will lead to death if proper ministrations does not take place, maybe even then. I don't know enough to know. But anyway, “He was sick of a fever and of a bloody flux. And Paul entered in unto him and prayed and laid hands upon him and healed him.”

There's a great deal of ado today over healing ministries, as you well know, and the charismatics make a great deal over things like this. I don't want to spend time on that particular issue today, but simply to say this, that the apostles were individuals who had special gifts that were given to them for the age in which they lived. You may remember that Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 says, “The signs of an apostle were wrought among you Corinthians.” In other words, there were certain spiritual gifts, the miraculous gifts, that were given to the apostles which they exercise at that particular time in the flow of the unfolding of the divine revelation, to give authentication to their ministry. That was true of the apostle of our Lord's life who performed certain miracles to authenticate his right to the title of Messiah. In the Old Testament it was said in the book of Isaiah that, “The Messiah when he came, he would perform those miraculous works.” And so the Lord Jesus performed them. And when John the Baptist said and asked, “Was he really the one who was to come, or not?” Jesus responded by referring John to the passages of the Old Testament that said that, “He, the Messiah would perform such miraculous works.”

The apostles followed, and performed those works in order that their ministry might be authenticated. It helps us to remember, that after all, up to this time, the divine revelation was essentially in the hands of the Jews, and now the gospel was going to go out to the Gentiles, and had been going out to the Gentiles, and there would be a natural question raised by anyone who knew much about the divine revelation, “What right do they have to say that they are authentic representatives of the Lord God of Israel?” And so the mighty works performed by our Lord, and then the continuation of them in the apostolic age, were designed to authenticate the message of the apostles, as being a message authenticated by heaven itself, in the miraculous works. Now, it is characteristic of the history of the Christian church, unfortunately, I think we forget these things, but

since the days of the apostles, there have been no such miracles as were performed by our Lord, and by the apostles. Many claims, but unauthenticated. No one is raising people from the dead today. There are certain claims, but almost inevitably as they are investigated, they are proven to be false. A few years back there was a report of a number of miracles out in the East Indies, and some investigation was finally made by some responsible men, and they discovered it was really a semantic problem; that they had used terms, such as we might use of a person who was converted who came from death into life. And they were misunderstood, and so the report circulated of people being raised from the dead, but they are not authenticated by a believable or credible documentation. When the apostle performed the miracles, he performed them as an apostle, and so, consequently, that was just another way of God saying, “He is a true representative of my word and my will.”

There is another interesting thing here that in verse 8 it says, “Paul entered into Publius’ father, prayed, laid his hands upon him, and healed him.” And as you might expect after this was done, Luke goes on to say, “Others also, which had diseases in the island came, and were healed.” Now, if you were able to look at the Greek text, you would see what I’m going to try to point out to you, and I hope you will be able to grasp it, because it’s not too difficult to grasp. We read in verse 8, “And laid his hands on him, and healed him.” Now, that is a verb *iaomai* that can mean “to perform a supernatural work of healing.” In fact, it frequently does. In verse 9, when we read, “When this was done others also, which had diseases in the island came, and were healed,” the word that is used here is a different word. This is the word *therapeuō*. Now *therapeuō* is the word from which we get the English word “therapeutic,” so it suggests by its very derivation, and by its very usage later on, the kind of healing that may come from the ministration of a human being; that is, the agency or instrumentality of a physician. Well, it so happens that Luke is with the apostle, and many have thought that it is possible, that the way we are to understand this is that the Apostle Paul performed certain works of healing as an apostle. They were miraculous, supernatural works designed to authenticate his ministry. But, nevertheless, Luke was with him, and after all, apostles had

compassion, and seeing the needs of that island, and how they had treated them so well, Luke ministered to them, and many were healed of their diseases.

Now, I'd like to say that, that is not something we can say is absolutely true to the text because it so happens that second verb can also, upon occasion, be used of something that is supernatural, but that's the normal usage, and many of the interpreters of the book of Acts have concluded, that since Luke was with Paul, it probably is a reference to the ministry that was performed by Luke.

Now, the last lap of the journey follows in verse 11 through verse 16. The apostle is on a boat. The boat has on its prow a sign. It, probably, and we're not absolutely sure of this, but we are told here in verse 11, “which had wintered in the isle, this boat whose sign was Castor and Pollux.” Now, did you study Greek mythology when you were in school? Well, since I majored in the Classics, I had to study things like this. I had to have courses in Greek mythology, and if you had to have them, you remember that Zeus had two sons by Leda, and the two sons were Castor and Pollux. And they became the tutelary deities of sailors and navigators, so not surprisingly in a superstitious, superstitious age, you would find ships which had the statues or some representation or image of these two gods upon them. So you have the false gods Castor and Pollux on the prow of the ship, and standing on the deck is the apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. What an interesting conjunction of the false and the true. So Paul's sailing on a boat which is proclaiming Castor and Pollux and the deities of the Romans and the Greeks, and God's apostle, the apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ on the deck.

Now, when Paul travels, they made their way finally to Italy, and he came to Puteoli or Puteoli as it has often been pronounced, and there Luke says, “where we found brethren.” I like that clause, because it suggests to me something that's very important for Christians to remember. I'd like for you to turn in your Bibles to chapter 18 of the Gospel of Luke. We'll just look at two verses, Luke chapter 18 in verse 29 and verse 30.

Before I say anything about this, I want to remind you of the way in which maps were written generations ago. You’ve probably seen some of those ancient maps. They picture certain well-known points upon those maps, and then the vast areas which have never been explored, and it was the custom in ancient times often, to put on these maps “Demons live here,” and things like that. The things that were known were on the maps, but since vast territory was unknown, it was characteristic to put things like demons, fierce beasts, or anything they could think of, probably lying out in those territories. One of the characteristic things of the Christian faith is, as far as map makers are concerned, if they’d been Christian mapmakers, and if they’d really been following the teaching of the Word of God, and believing it, even though they had never experienced what was actually out there humanly speaking, they could put “God is there. God is there, and God is there,” because essentially this world is the Lord God’s. And one of the great promises of the Word of God to me, because I’ve experienced this, is verse 29 and verse 30 of Luke chapter 18. “And he said unto them; Verily, I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children for the kingdom of God’s sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come everlasting life.” What a magnificent promise. What a magnificent promise to go along with the preaching of the gospel, and to go along with the sense of the terror, often, of the decision for Christ.

So many people when they reflect upon the fact, hearing the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, that believing in him means a whole transformation of my life, find it somewhat terrifying to think “I’m going to become a Christian” or “Am I going to become a Christian, and what is that going to do to me and to my life?” Well, for most of us who become a Christian, if we lived in the world as I lived in the world, it means a whole new kind of life. It means a whole new body of friends. It means whole new relationships. It means a new relationship to one’s own family, to one’s father, to one’s mother, to one’s sister, brother, and to one’s friends. And having experienced that being twenty-five years of age when I came to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and I look back, and think about the kind of life that I was living. I was not living a, what I would, what the world would call a

sinful life, although it was, as we all live lives of sin. But I was in my father’s insurance business. I had been a fairly well-known amateur golfer; was playing in gold tournaments, and had won the Carolinas Amateur Championship in my senior year in college; was playing in the National Amateur, playing in professional tournaments too, but playing as an amateur; enjoyed that as a hobby. I was in the insurance business, studying intently at night to make as much money as I possibly could. My father had been a successful insurance man. I wanted to be a successful insurance man.

And then I heard the gospel and my whole life literally changed; not that I didn’t like to shoot a few birdies on a golf course whenever I went out. I just didn’t spend as much time on a golf course. Studying the Scriptures became my activity and my hobby, rather than studying insurance manuals, and books on insurance, and things like that. Until finally, that was so engrossing to me, that ultimately God put his hand upon me, and called me to, led me into the ministry of the Word of God as a life’s calling. And I look back on my friends that I had; some very good friends. In fact, many of them are still my friends, but we’re not close. Many of their interests, many of them have interests that are not spiritual at all. A few have. I have a very few who were Christians. I can remember one young man who was a lawyer, later a State senator in South Carolina; a rather well-known and important man in the city of Charleston right now. I can remember with him, when he would come over and spend the night with me, when we got ready to go to bed, we would go in, he was Southern Conference welterweight boxing champion, and he’d get down on his knees and pray. And I can remember sitting by my bed, and watching Allan Legree pray. I’d say, “You know, that’s an interesting thing.” He was a Presbyterian. I was a Presbyterian, but I was not a praying Presbyterian. He was a praying Presbyterian. He got down on his knees and prayed, and I can still remember watching him and saying, “Now, he really evidently has some kind of allegiance to the Lord.” It wasn’t great, because the rest of the day, we were pretty much the same kinds of person, but there was something there anyway, and Allan’s still a close friend of mine. I saw him a couple of times this year.

But most of my friends vanished, as far as being close friends are concerned, but oh how many I think I have as a result of what I thought was the loss of my friends and the loss of my family. This promise is truly a reliable, absolutely authentic, and genuine promise, “There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children for the kingdom of God’s sake, who shall not receive manifold more in the present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.” Let me say to you, if there is someone in this audience who is thinking about what it means to become a Christian, you can rely completely upon Luke’s marvelous words. To give up what you have, is to gain so much more.

Now, when the apostle arrived there, they found brethren; God working almost everywhere. It’s a striking thing. I’ve traveled fairly widely; not as widely as some, but fairly widely. There is hardly any place to which I’ve ever gone, that you could not find some genuine believers in the Lord Jesus Christ if you made half an effort to find them. Well, “Paul found brethren, and they were desirous to tarry with them seven days, and so we went on our journey toward Rome.” And word traveled fast. Paul is in Italy, and so when the brethren heard of them, they went out to meet them, and there were Priscilla, and Aquila, and Epaenetus, and Mary, and Andronichus, and Junia, and others. They’re not mentioned here. They’re mentioned in the sixteenth chapter of Paul’s letters to the Romans. He came to know through correspondence, a great number of these people, and had actually written to them and they, when they heard that Paul was there, they rushed out thirty, or forty, or fifty miles down the Apian Way in order to meet them. And finally, we read in verse 16, “And so we came to Rome,” or “We came to Rome.”

Now, Martha and I this past week were reading in the Psalms in Scripture reading after breakfast as we generally do, and one of the texts that we read this week was Psalm 107. And in that particular Psalm, there is description of people who go out to sea, and then in verse 30, I believe it is, is the clause, “so he bringeth them into their desired haven.” Well, that’s precisely what we have here. Paul is brought to Rome, and if you go all the way back to chapter 19 in about verse 21 we read, “After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia

and Achaia to go to Jerusalem saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’” And then in chapter 23 in verse 11, a passage I referred to already, the Lord stood by him in the midst of his troubles before the council and said, “Be of good cheer Paul, for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.” And so he comes to Rome.

Now, I’ll sum up what is said here by saying, first there is illustrated here the certainty of the promises of God. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Oh, the certainty of the promises of the Word of God, and the apostle in his own experience found that to be true. Notice too secondly, the necessity of acknowledging the source of the blessing. We read in verse 15, “He thanked God, and took courage.” “Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men,” we also read in that Psalm, so it’s proper characteristic, and the kind of thing that pleases God for Christians to give thanks for the blessing of God.

One last comment. One might ask, seeing we have some miracles here again, “What’s the significance of the miraculous in the book of Acts?” Luke has recorded a number of them. He recorded the one at Samaria, and Simon Mageus was involved there, and that clearly had reference to the kingdom of Satan. When Paul reached the island of Cyprus, Aleamos the sorcerer was there, and Paul performed a miraculous miracle there with Aleamos the sorcerer, suggestive again of satanic power. When he was in Philippi, there was the girl who was involved with the python; again, satanic involvement. And perhaps here, when he performed the miracle, the viper suggested to the apostle, that old serpent, Satan himself, and the truth of our Lord’s ministry, as that which breaks the bonds of Satan himself. Now, when we reflect upon the fact, that the Lord said, “Paul,” when he called him to the ministry of apostleship, “one of the things you’re going to do, is to turn men from the power of Satan to the power of God.” I don’t think we’re surmising too much to think, that when the apostle performed his miracle, it was just one, in this case, final way of indicating that the power of God stood behind the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the kingdom of Satan is overthrown by the work of the cross.

If you're here today, and you've never believed in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we invite you to come to him. We invite you also, if it should be the will of God, and the working of the Holy Spirit in your life, we invite you to receive as a free gift, the forgiveness of sins. If God has brought you to the place where you recognize your guilt and condemnation, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is for you, and eternal life may be yours through the receptive instrumentality of trust in our Lord. May God bring you to trust in him. It is not by works that we do. It is by the work that he has done that we are saved. May God, if you don't know the forgiveness of sins, may God bring you to him.

Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] We thank Thee Lord for these wonderful words, which on the surface seem so prosaic, but when we reflect upon them are so significant. We thank Thee for the presence of the lord Jesus Christ in our lives, and in the life of the local church. Lord we pray that Thou wilt remove the scales from our spirit. [End of Tape]