

THE LAST ROUND-UP

Acts 28:11-31

From four to six months had elapsed since Paul began his journey to Rome to stand trial before Caesar. It had been a period of testing, both physical and spiritual. One promise had undergirded him in all his trials. It was the assurance of the presence of God. This had given him strength and courage and hope. At last he was about to realize the dream of his life.

I. Paul's Desire to See Rome.

1. It was not the desire of the curious.
Travelers often have their hearts set on visiting certain places because of their historical value, or because of mercenary interests, but such were not the motives back of Paul's desire to go to Rome. While Rome was the central city of the civilized world at that time, and it was an honor to visit it because of its wide influence, this was not a factor in Paul's desire.
2. It was different from what he had hoped.
He went as a prisoner rather than a free man. He was bound with chains and had to look at the city from prison windows. In this there was disappointment. People often go out to see the world and find it quite different from what they had expected. Young people sometimes are moved with a desire to throw off the fetters and restraints of home life and go out to see the world, but it does not take them long to find that they are looking at a strange and disappointing world and they return to their homes greatly changed in their conception of its enchantments.
3. A man's view of life is determined largely by what is within his own heart, and by the motives that actuate him when he goes out to see life.
The robber and the minister look upon the same world. It means one thing to the robber and another thing to the minister. The difference is in what is in the mind and heart of the two.

II. Paul's Welcome to Rome.

1. By the Christians.
A group of believers went out of the city to meet Paul and his company. It is interesting to find that Christianity had preceded Paul to Rome. Someone had already carried the Gospel there. Christians had been made in that pagan city and they were waiting for Paul when he came.
2. By the Jews.
Paul called the leading Jews of the city to his house and explained his case to them. They confessed that they had heard of the Christian movement but knew nothing about it, except that it was spoken against. They also confessed that the Jews at Jerusalem had sent no information concerning Paul and the charges against him. This was in his favor, but he had yet to break down their prejudices.
3. By the Roman Court.
He was given unusual liberty by the Romans. This can be explained by the long journey in company with Roman officials. They had an opportunity to form an opinion of him. They had seen him in trials and he had deported himself honorably. He had saved their lives from death in the storm. He had healed the father of Publius on the island of Melita. Other things had strengthened their regard for

Paul, and, without doubt, the background of these days of travel made it favorable for Paul when he came into the hands of the officials at Rome. But the hand of fate seemed to be against him, for in these favorable circumstances he went to his death.

III. Paul's Work in Rome.

1. The place.

Paul received permission to live by himself in a lodging house in Rome, guarded by a soldier.

2. The preacher.

He was Paul, the mightiest preacher for Christ who ever lived. He could not go to the people because of his imprisonment, so the Lord sent the people to him. He turned his private house into a preaching place. Those in his audience would never hear that giant for God preach again. It was his last chance to speak; their's to listen. Imagine the feelings of the Apostle. He had come down to the end of his earthly journey when his work was finished and the record of his personal deeds was closed. As he looked at his hearers, he probably realized that might be his last chance to witness for Christ to them. Therefore, he spoke as a dying man to dying men.

3. The people.

The great number was made up predominately of laymen, or the rank and file of people, with a few Jewish clergymen—a cross section of Jewish life. There were the leaders and the led; the great and the small; the intelligent and the illiterate; the clergy and the common man. And while they differed in many respects, they all possessed immortal souls that would dwell eternally with God in heaven or with the devil in hell.

Paul shared a strong sense of pity and compassion for them all, regardless of their attitude or apparel. From personal experience, he knew what God could do with any and all who surrender their lives to him. He never ceased to wonder over the grace of God manifested toward him. Paul envied no man his possessions or position. He had eternal wealth of which they knew little or nothing.

4. The proclamation.

Since this was Paul's last round-up for God, what would one expect him to say? Being the scholar he was, he could have talked about many things, such as his earlier experience as a student at the feet of Gamaliel, the greatest teacher of his day, or about his many adventures as a missionary.

Instead, "He expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening." Expound means to set forth, to explain, to interpret or to make clear. One of the greatest needs of our day is expository preaching—taking sections of the Word of God, setting forth the great teachings of our faith, explaining this passage, and that word clearly, so the listeners can grasp its meaning. Both Peter and Paul were expository preachers. God's Word was the subject of their message and the source of their might.

5. The period.

This was an all-day preaching service. In his dealings with the sacred writings, Paul used all of the elements of scholarship—thoroughness, accuracy and emphasis. Paul knew it would be his last opportunity to tell the people about Christ, so he did not spare himself. As long as the people would listen, he would gladly speak.

6. The profit.

What were the results for all of that time and effort? "Some believed." This is invariably true where the gospel of Christ is preached in the power of the Spirit. But, as is usually the case, some did not believe.

7. The pronouncement.

Just before those unbelieving Jews stormed out of Paul's lodging house, he issued a word of warning—the words of God, Himself, as recorded in Isaiah. It was one of condemnation to all those who rejected his message. His pronouncement is recorded in verses 25-27. "And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."

This constituted his very last warning to them, and he ended with these climactic words: "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it." Verse 28. That was the last straw, for the mere mention of the word, "Gentiles," produced an uproar. With great haste they departed, never to be seen or heard of again. Alas! they had made the Great Refusal.

During the two years which followed, while Paul was waiting for the decision of the dictator on his case, he "received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him." What a tireless worker! During those last years he wrote his epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. He laid the foundation of Christianity so deep, so broad and so well that the ages have not uprooted it.