

PAUL'S LAST SERMON
March 26, 2017 morning service
Acts 28:16-29

Amen. Thank you, choir. We'll hear more of that tomorrow night with the choir from Woodstock that's going to be here with Dr. Hunt. You'll want to join us. No church tonight but tomorrow night at 6:00 you'll want to be here for that event of worship tomorrow night.

I come to Acts 28 this morning as we've come to sermon number ten found in the book of Acts, these printed sermons. The sermon that we find Paul preaching I call "Paul's Last Sermon." Now that's not his last sermon. We know he's going to preach many, many more times but the last time we find him recorded is in Acts 28. He has a very pointed word for the people. Paul has been in Caesarea. He is taken prisoner. He appeals to Caesar and they say, "If you want to see Caesar, to Caesar you shall go."

He goes through a rough cruise. Have you ever been on a rough cruise? You've never been on a rough cruise like Paul went on. Man, he winds up shipwrecked. He's on a board paddling and winds up on an island that's inhabited and there on that island he builds a fire and a snake jumps out, attaches itself to him. They think he's going to die. God touches him and brings a miracle of life in Paul and he's alive and well and preaching the gospel. From there they get another ship and they make their way finally to the great city of Rome. Rome is populated with two million people. Half a million people in that city are slaves. Every other person you'd see in Rome in 60 A.D. was a slave. Now you have to understand they had doctors that were slaves. They had merchants that were slaves. These were not just people working fields. These were people working in every strata of life but they were slaves.

It is said of Rome in that 60 A.D. period there were two things that the Romans lived for. Bread and the circus. Bread because they were all but starving and if they could get food. The other thing was at the circus. Now not the circus that we know today with elephants and tigers but it was the arena event of entertainment. They lived for food and they lived for entertainment. Nero was the Caesar. He was the emperor. Caesar murdered his mother. Caesar murdered his own wife. Caesar then married a eunuch in the last part of his life before Rome was burned while Nero fiddled life away. Paul is there in chains awaiting trial and we find him coming into Rome.

There are seven synagogues in Rome and he calls those Jewish leaders together and he's got a word for the Jew here in the great city of the world, Rome. We pick up the text in Acts 28 and verse 16.

When we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him. After three days Paul called together those who were the leading men of the Jews, and when they came together, he began saying to them, "Brethren, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers,

yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. And when they had examined me, they were willing to release me because there was no ground for putting me to death. But when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar, not that I had any accusation against my nation. For this reason, therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you [these are the leaders of the seven synagogues of Rome and to speak with you], for I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel.” They said to him, “We have neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren come here and reported or spoken anything bad about you. But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere.”

When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe. And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, “The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, saying,

*‘Go to this people and say,
“You will keep on hearing, but will not understand;
And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;
For the heart of this people has become dull,
And with their ears they scarcely hear,
And they have closed their eyes;
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
And hear with their ears,
And understand with their heart and return,
And I would heal them.”’*

Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen.” When he had spoken these words, the Jews departed, having a great dispute among themselves.¹

I’m saving the last two verses and two weeks from today I’m going to preach out of those last two verses. It may be the best sermon I’ve ever prepared in my life is out of those last two verses but we’ll just deal with one of the worst I’ve prepared for a few minutes.

Paul’s come to Rome. He’s preaching his last sermon. He’s called these Jews from the seven synagogues together and they’ve talked. Then they said, “We want to hear more about this.” He said, “Okay, go back to your synagogues. Invite your friends.” They came in large numbers to that dwelling place where Paul was kept and he began to preach unto them as he said about the hope of Israel as he talked about in verse 20 that I am wearing this chain for the hope of Israel. What was it Paul said in

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this last sermon? I want to give you his topic, his text, and his turning. These three things I want to mine from these words.

First of all, what was Paul's topic? We find this topic in verse 23. Look at it right there in your Bible. Here's what Paul had to say. *When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers. He had a big crowd. And he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus.* Here was Paul's topic. The kingdom and the Christ. The kingdom and the Christ. It was about the kingdom of God and Jesus the Nazarene. Paul had one topic. It was Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. I'm telling you, he was driving home the kingdom of God and Jesus. Well the question then begs, what did Jesus say about the kingdom of God? Much.

Listen to the word of God in Matthew 6:33 where Jesus said: But seek first God's kingdom, His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom." Don't seek first yourself. Don't seek your synagogue. Don't seek the ordinances of the church. Don't seek love. Don't seek friendship. Seek first God's kingdom. Amen. Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God." In Matthew 19 and verse 24 he said: *Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.*" He was saying, "I'm telling you, you've got to humble yourself and you will enter this kingdom with difficulty." You do not come with your chest thrown back and saying, "Boy, look at me." No, sir. If you've got the things of this world, they will hinder you from the kingdom if you have eyes for the gold that glitters rather than for the God who saves. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

Now he's not talking about a sewing needle. He's talking about that little place called the eye of the needle in the gate of the city of Jerusalem. When they would open wide the gates, people would come in but at night they would shut the gates. If a stranger came during the night they wouldn't open up the gates wide. They had a small door that a man had to come through just single. It was the eye of the needle. If a man was riding a camel it was very difficult for that camel to get in. He had to get on his knees and all but crawl that camel did. It was easier for a camel to go through that hole than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom. What's the rich man have to do? He's got to humble himself. It's very difficult but you have to humble yourself to come to the kingdom.

In Mark 1:15, Jesus said unto these Jews, he was saying, "The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel." How do you come to the kingdom? You repent and you believe the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Mark 10:15, Jesus said it this way: *"Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all."* You don't come high and mighty. You come like a child. A child will believe you. You've got to come like children unto God.

We have, like many of you in this service, we are grandparents and we're learning again about children. I was with my little granddaughter yesterday and there

was a big crowd of people at a dinner and she came and got me when I got out of the car and she grabbed me by the finger. She said, "Poppa, come with me." And she went way off from where everybody else was and she looked and she said, "Now get down and listen real close." I said, "Yes, Kathryn, what is it?" She said – and she looked around. She didn't want anybody else to hear it. She turned her arm over and she had fallen and scratched herself. She said, "I was playing outside and I scratched my arm and it hurt." I rubbed it and kissed it and said, "Did mother put something on it?" "Yes." "Are you okay?" "Yes." "Anything else?" "No, that's all I needed to say." And she was gone.

You see, kids are simple. Kids believe. Let me tell you, friend, you haven't got to figure out all the theology to get saved. You haven't got to know everything. I've got a doctor's degree in theology and I don't know much of it. I've been studying this stuff since I was 17 years old but the essentials are this. God loves you, Jesus died for you, and you must believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you believe, He'll save. You say, "I don't know." Come like a child. Come like a child. Say, "Lord, here's my hurt. Save me." Paul was hammering home his topic, the kingdom of God. In John's gospel chapter 3 and verse 3, Jesus said it this way. *Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

Friend, you'll never get in the kingdom of God unless you are birthed not just in your flesh but birthed in your spirit. You must be born again. Paul would write to the Corinthians in I Corinthians chapter 15 and verse number 50. *Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.* He is hammering home to those Corinthians, "I don't care how high and mighty you are. You're flesh and blood." What you do, your job doesn't get you there. Whose daddy is yours doesn't get you there. It doesn't matter what family you're in. Unless you're in the family of God you don't see the kingdom. Flesh and blood won't get you there.

Then in Romans 14:17 he's right here in Rome talking about this. He'll later write to the Romans and he says this: *for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking* [What did I say the Romans live for? They live for bread and entertainment. He said the kingdom is not eating and drink], *but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

That's what the kingdom is. The kingdom of Almighty God. That was his topic. You say, "Pastor, how do I enter the kingdom?" You've got to crown Him King. You've got to take the crown off of your life and put it on the life of Jesus. What was his topic? His topic was simple. He was trying to persuade them in this text in verse 23 that Jesus was God and that He ruled the kingdom. Verse 24 says, "And many, some were being persuaded but others would not believe."

Isn't it amazing how that the same heat, the same heat will melt wax and harden clay? That's what happens when the glorious light of the heat of the gospel comes. Some melt and believe. Others are hardened and believe not. Which one are you

today? Has the glory of God melted your heart and you believed and go public with that? Or does your heart get hard? Let me tell you, friend, the more times you say no the harder your heart gets. Some believed and others did not. It was his topic.

So when Paul saw all of that he then took a text and his text was from Isaiah 6:9-10. You notice he says it right here. Look in verse 25. Paul said, "I've got one more word. Just one more thing." They were beginning to leave and Paul said, "Just before you go, I've got a concluding thought and here it was." The Holy Spirit right there spoke through Isaiah the prophet when he said unto your fathers. Then he quoted Isaiah chapter 6, verses 9 and 10. He said about your fathers, about your Jewish forefathers. "Even during the days of the prophets, the Jews, they would hear but they wouldn't perceive. They could see but they close their eyes." They had a heart but it had become dull to the things of God.

This is a word of warning, judgment, and condemnation. Paul is saying to the Jews there in Rome. Your daddies and your mommas and your granddaddies and your great-grandfathers, they heard all of this from the judges and the prophets and they too would not believe and you are just like them. That's what Isaiah said. These Jews are like Baptists. They'll come listen but they won't perceive. They've got wax in their ears. They come and they see but they choose to close their eyes. Their heart gets dull, dumb, down. Friend, what are you doing with the gospel? You hear it and you see it and you feel it but are you doing anything with it? Have you believe on the Lord Christ? Are you sharing it with the world?

He took his text. You see, Paul's a Bible preacher and he's saying, "Listen, look, and learn." Listen, look, and learn. Listen, look, and learn. Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the word of God. You do not live by sight but you walk by faith. Let your heart be strangely warm. My heart was strangely warmed yesterday. I got a letter in the mail at my house. You could tell it had several pages and when I opened it up it had like 12 pages written front and back. It was from a gentleman who used to go to church here. He's now in prison. God's changed his life. He said, "Pastor, I've just got 3 ½ more years in this place. I'm going to get out. God set my heart afire." He outlined the ministry. He shared with me how many people he had led to faith in the prison. I know this gentleman and I believe this gentleman. I've seen the fruit in his life because his heart's been strangely warmed. He's doing something with the gospel. He's listening, he's looking, and he's learning.

I am amazed who sits in this room. You never know who's sitting in this room. You never know who's watching by television or listening on the radio or with us online with the Internet. It's an amazing time that we live in for communication. Last Sunday morning I got a text from Amsterdam as soon as I finished preaching. "Listening in Amsterdam this morning, pastor." One of our deacons on a business trip. He quoted part of my message. He knew I didn't believe him so he quoted me. Isn't that amazing? I mean we're standing right here before 10:30 on a Sunday morning and somebody a third of the way around the world is tuned in listening to us. Not just doing it here but thousands of other churches and people are listening all over the world.

You listen and you see but what do you do? What do you do? He said to these Jews. He condemned them. He said, "You've heard all your life. You've listened all your life. You've seen it all your life and your daddies and forefathers and your great-great-grandad but you're dead. You're dead. It's not enough to come listen. It's not enough to see. Your heart's got to be warmed and God change you.

Paul had a topic. It was Christ and the kingdom. He had a text and it was Isaiah. In the last part of this sermon there was a turning. Paul said, "Because you won't listen I am turning away from you Jews and I'm going to the Gentiles." Look at it right here in verse 28. Therefore, let it be known to you to the Jews that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles. They will also listen. Paul said, "I'm turning." We preached to the Jews and he said, "Now I'm turning to the Gentiles." Now listen to me. He is not saying that a Jew cannot get saved. He's just saying and our pragmatism tells us that not many Jews get saved. They're steeped in Old Testament and they know there's a promise of a Messiah but they won't believe. The great majority of the Jew will not believe but they can.

Joel Rosenberg. What a great witness. Here's a Jewish writer. His daddy was raised in a Jewish orthodox home. I mean as strict Jewish orthodox as you could be and when his daddy married a Gentile his mother, Rosenberg's grandmother, offered her own son – they had given him a family heirloom ring and said, "We will buy it back from you and give you more money than it's worth if you will not marry her. Don't marry outside of Judaism." He did it anyway. He was lost. She was lost. They moved to New York. They had a baby boy. There he is. Joel Rosenberg. If you haven't read some of his stuff, you ought to get his books. He will light you up. I've made an overture a time or two to try to get him to come preach for us. I hope he'll come.

Joel Rosenberg got saved in a house in Syracuse, New York in a kitchen listening to a preacher from India while he cooked talking over the kingdom of God and Jesus. God saved Joel Rosenberg. I'm telling you, a Jew can get saved but not many do. They just don't. They've been given so much. Let me say, if any of my Jewish friends are watching or listening in this room or through this device believe today on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. He loves you. Baptists love you. Christians love you. Rabbis say from time to time to those of us that try to proselytize out of Judaism and they say, "Don't try to change our Jewish friends." Why? It's a Jew that changed me. It was one of yours that came and proselytized me. His name is Jesus Christ out of that Jewish heritage.

Paul said, "Not many will believe so I'm turning and I'm going to take the gospel to the world." How did he do that? How did Paul touch the world from a Roman jail? He's living in his own rented quarters. I'm going to preach about that two weeks from today. I can't wait to get to verse 30. How in the world did Paul rent a house and live in it? Well he did. So Paul did three things to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Number one. He preached to the people who came to visit with him in the house and always, 24 hours a day, eight hour shifts, there was never a moment in those two years that Paul

did not have a chain around his arm that was attached to a Roman soldier. The Praetorian Guard. The elite military force of Rome. Fifteen thousand of these men in Rome that looked after Nero and everything around Caesar's house, they were assigned. At every eight hours they unbuckled and another one came in and buckled up. Eight hours went by. They unbuckled and went out and another one came in. God just sent the harvest to Paul. It's hard to get away from the preacher when you're chained to him.

The Bible tells us over in Philippians chapter 1 – you read it in Philippians 1:13, Paul talked about how the message went through the Praetorian guard of the gospel. Who are you chained to? You're chained to somebody. You ought to be speaking the gospel wherever you're chained to. If you're chained to a desk, speak the gospel. If you're chained to a classroom, speak the gospel. You're chained somewhere with people running in and out. I'm telling you, if you can know your neighbors – I met a new neighbor of mine this week. I'd never met her before. She's from so far out of town she doesn't even know who I am or what I do. I said, "Praise God." If I can just keep it hidden that I'm a gospel preacher I might just get to preach the gospel. Amen?

He was chained to the Praetorian. These guys, they were the elites, the elite fighting force. This is the upper echelon of the Marine Corps. These are the seals. These are the guys that get it done. Paul's chained to them and many of them believed. Paul, first of all, shared the gospel to the people he was chained to. His friends would come. They'd visit with him and they'd talk. Paul would say, "You know." He's just sharing the gospel of the Lord. This guy chained to him, he's hearing every bit of it. He can't go to sleep. He's got to stay awake. Why? He's got to guard the prisoner. Secondly, Paul wrote letters. He wrote at least four epistles from this two year stay in a Roman house of his rented quarters. He wrote Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon from this Roman cell. There's a guard chained to him while he's writing. You know he's got to be reading these letters out loud. "Well, did I say that just right?"

The Bible tells us that all scripture is written by the inspiration. Let me tell you, the Spirit of the living God was in Paul and on Paul and he's writing Holy Scripture and this old guard chained to him – what a seat for the kingdom. Some of those guards believed and some of them didn't believe. Paul preached to who he was chained to. Secondly, he wrote letters. Today when we leave here you're going to go out these doors and you're going to drop money in a Bible. You're going to drop it in an offering plate. You're going to send these letters around the world. You're going to help do what Paul intended and that is send the scriptures around the world. That's how it works is that we take the Bible.

Thirdly, not only did he preach to who he was chained to and write letters, thirdly, Paul was released from this Roman jail. For a while he then traveled with the gospel to where God would let him go. He wound up back here and was martyred for the faith. He shared with those closest to him. He wrote letters to the people that he knew and he traveled and shared as God would let him do it. Paul turned from the Jew to the Gentile. To our Jewish friends, God'll save you if you'll believe on the name of the Lord

Jesus Christ. To my Gentile friends, He'll save you if you'll believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was the 23rd day of May, 1939. America was staring down the gun barrel of entering World War II. Our president was reinforcing the military. We were building back that military. One of those vessels that had been built was the U.S. Submarine, the Squalus. The Squalus was off the coast of New Hampshire on the 23rd day of May, 1939 when one of the chambers was breached and water flooded one of the chambers of the submarine, the Squalus. She sank. Of the 59 crew, 26 died in that watery grave and 33 were still alive 240 feet below the surface in a frigid tomb wondering, "Can we ever get out of here?" The commander sent up red dye to mark the water where they went down. They also ran a buoy up with a radio cable so if anyone knew of it or found them they could communicate back.

As sovereign grace would have it another ship did find them but now they had to get these 33 out of that submarine and to the surface. There was a brand new device called the Momsen McCann Rescue Chamber. It was brand new. It was devised to send that rescue chamber to a sunken sub attached to it and let the people get out and in and take it up. So they sent the Momsen McCann device down four times. It could only carry a small payload. There were four Navy divers that all received the Medal of Honor after this. They went down and filled it up and to the top. Went down, filled it up and to the top. Four times they went and those 33 got out onto that rescue chamber and went to the top.

They made a fifth trip and went in the chamber that had been flooded to see if there were any survivors. None were alive. All were dead. What amazes me about that story is that not one of the 33 people trapped in that Squalus Submarine refused to get into the rescue chamber. They had never done it before. They didn't know if it would work. They didn't know it might be worse in there than it was where they were. They absolutely did not know but not one of the 33 men refused to get in.

God sent a rescue chamber for you. That chamber is an empty tomb and there's an extended hand that says you're sunk without God. If you would but believe. You say, "I've never tried it before." I understand. "I've never done." I understand. "Are you sure it'll work?" I don't know. I've never been to heaven. I have the promise of God and He offers that to me and whoever will believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ will be – we did a song about this a while ago – will be saved, saved. The chamber has come for you. His name is Christ. If you'll crown Him king, He'll change your life. He'll do it.

Some of you are going to be just like those Jews. You're going to turn your back and say, "No, not me." Some of you are going to be like Philemon. Paul met him. He was a slave. He led him to Jesus. That's the reason Paul wrote Philemon. He sent it back to Philemon and said about this slave. He said, "He's been saved. You need to help him." Some of you are like that you're going to believe on the name of the Lord

Jesus. Some of you like Joel Rosenberg, you're going to say, "I'm ready to believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."

I talked to a sweet Catholic girl this week. I walked all over this church with her. Not in here but I mean up and down the hall showing her – and she was dragging two kids. I was here on Friday and she came in wanting to know about the church, wanting to know about child care. I said, "Come on. Let's take a walk." I left the office and we walked all the way down here to the children's building. She said, "Wow, this is like a big place." I said, "Well it is sometimes." She said, "Will my kids be safe here?" I said, "Yes, ma'am." I said, "We don't have enough electronics to do open heart surgery but we can take your appendix out down here." She said, "You're just kidding, aren't you?" I said, "Yeah. I am." I said, "We'll do everything in our power to keep your children safe." What goes on in that classroom? Well what's the topic? The kingdom of God and Jesus. That's what we're going to talk to Bonnie about and this other little fellow that's five. I'm here to tell you, he is totally depraved just like you. He needs Christ.

I tried to share with that dear Catholic lady. You know, it's a big jump for people that grew up in Catholicism to become a Baptist but when God warms your heart you know it's what you ought to do. It's what you ought to do. For a Jewish person.

You see, friend, we're not talking about swapping religion. We're talking about meeting the living God. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. He sent the rescue chamber and if you'll get out of your sunkenness and step into his salvation, He'll change your life. Paul preached that for two years in Rome and I'm telling you, a lot of people got saved. The Catholic church started out – they've got a big outfit over there right now. It's where the gospel started and it's come here today and it's made an offer to you.

If you've never been saved I want you to get out of your seat and walk right here. If you've never joined the church and you know you ought to do it, I want you to get out of your seat and walk right here. If you've been a long way from God and you know you ought to come home today, I want you to get out of your seat and walk right here. You say, "What do I do when I come there?" We're going to help you. You don't have to sing. We're not going to embarrass you. You don't have to make a speech. We're going to walk out a side door and sit in a quiet place. Your family can come with you. Friends can come with you. God offers to you and He said, "If you will but crown Me King, I will change your life for eternity." I'm going to invite you to come today. To come and say yes to Christ, yes to His church, yes to covenant relationship right here. It's a good day to do it and God extends Himself unto you.

I'm going to be right here, a couple of our staffers. God's calling. You come. Let's stand together.

Father, draw us to Yourself today, I pray. Draw us, save, and encourage, in Jesus' name.