

God simply recognized the condition which they had willfully chosen. The Jew may still be saved, even as the Gentile. Both must yield themselves to Christ.

Let this be a warning to you. God gives you the light of truth, but you must see. He speaks the word of salvation, but you must heed. He opens the way, but you must walk in it. To refuse is for you to be spiritually blind, deaf, and lost. Like the Jews you may refuse only to be invited again. But the time will come when you can neither see, hear, nor re-

spond, either because of death or because of a final hardening of your heart. Then the choice is final and fatal. You will have been completely enslaved by the bondage that dooms.

While you can still see, hear, and respond, I beg you to do so. Your conviction of sin and consciousness of the need of salvation is God's Holy Spirit pleading with you about the "kingdom of God, persuading [you] . . . concerning Jesus." I pray that you will be fully persuaded as you place your faith in Him.

THE BONDAGE THAT SAVES

September 13, 1959

"Be it known unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" — Acts 28:28

This is the last of our messages from the book of Acts. Luke has completed his account of the preaching of the gospel from Jerusalem to the uttermost part of the earth (1:8). Probably he intended writing another book (1:1). But for the present his purpose is realized. Many reasons have been suggested for this book. Perhaps all have merit. But we like that set forth by Dr. Frank Staggs that Luke is recording the first century struggle for an unhindered gospel despite persecution and rejection. The last word of Acts in the Greek text is an adverb (*akolutos*) meaning "unhinderedly."

After the Jews departed Paul remained in bondage for two whole years, dwelling in his own hired house, probably chained to a Roman soldier. Note that Paul practiced the complete separation of church and state. Out of his own funds he provided a place to preach and teach the gospel. In that regard he was "unhindered" by any obligation to the Roman government. During this time he wrote some of his greatest epistles and continued

to preach and teach with his customary fervor. Though the messenger was in bondage, the word of God was not bound (II Tim. 2:9). In this thought we are reminded of the bondage that saves. Though Paul was in bondage, he loosed the gospel which struck off the shackles of ignorance and sin which bound others.

This we shall see as we examine, first, the message declared; second, the message received; third, the message defined.

First, note the message declared. In verse 28 Paul describes it as "the salvation of God." The word translated "salvation" is often used in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) to refer to the Messianic salvation. It could also mean the One bringing salvation (Lk. 2:30). So the center of Paul's message was Jesus as the Messiah, the One bringing God's salvation.

We noted last week how Paul preached Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah or Christ. Remember also that some of the Jews began to be persuaded, while others continued to disbelieve. Therefore the apostle said that "the one bringing the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles,

and that they will hear . . ." (v.28).

The Jews, Paul said, heard without understanding, and looked without retaining that which they saw. The word "perceive" (*horao*) means to see and retain the vision. The word "understand" is a picturesque one. It means to set or bring together, to put the perception with the thing perceived, or to set or join together in the mind—hence, to understand. So the Jews, hearing and seeing their Old Testament scriptures, failed to relate them to Jesus Christ, the One bringing salvation. Paul related it for them, but they never joined the two ideas together in their minds. They looked at it, but did not retain the vision.

Which suggests that mere physical hearing and looking are not enough. Every teacher of God's word should remember this. Simply to impart Bible truth is of little value unless it be related to the soul salvation and daily living of our listeners. You who are taught must receive the truth not as mental information but as soul knowledge by which you will come to know Him who is the One bringing God's salvation. One of the most profane men I ever knew could quote more Scripture than most preachers whom I know. He knew the letter of the word of God, but he did not know Him who is the Incarnate Word of God, our Saviour.

Paul said that the Gentiles will "hear" the gospel. They will hear and heed. This does not mean that every Gentile will do so, but that as a group they will give to it a better reception than did the Jews. Nor does Paul mean that no Jews will hear and heed. While as a group they rejected the gospel, yet many did and do receive it into their hearts.

Second, the message received. Luke tells us that for two years Paul "received all that came in unto him" (v.30). Paul was ready to preach the gospel to any who would listen. He was "an ambassador in bonds" speaking boldly as he should speak (Eph. 6:20). And many who listened received Paul's message unto

salvation. Who were some of these who came to Paul?

We may well hope that the Jews who "began to be persuaded" returned to be fully convinced unto their personal faith in Jesus Christ. Most certainly many of Paul's friends visited him. This we know from mention of them in the various epistles written during Paul's first Roman imprisonment. Worthy of mention is Onesimus, a runaway slave, who came to Paul a fugitive from justice and left a brother beloved through faith in Jesus.

But those commanding our interest at present are the ones included in Paul's statements in Philippians. In 1:13 he speaks of the furtherance of the gospel "so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places." In 4:22 Paul adds, "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household."

These verses are of disputed meaning. "In all the palace" translates a word sometimes referring to the palace and at others to the Praetorium Guard, a choice band of Roman soldiers. This latter appears to be the true meaning. Twenty-four hours a day for two years Paul was chained to a Roman soldier. What a captive audience! Doubtless he preached to and won many of these to Christ. As word spread concerning this little man, others from Caesar's household—slaves, freedmen, even the highest of patricians—came to hear him. Many of them went away as Christians.

The point which I wish to emphasize is the wide variety of people who came to Paul who "received all that came to him." His was no audience either of slaves or of the elite. The Christian gospel is for all men. It is for the up-and-out as well as for the down-and-out.

Whether you live on Park Avenue or Skid Row your fundamental need is the same. Regardless of your earthly position, before God you are a sinner for whom Christ died. Paul preached to skeptics, slaves, soldiers, petty officers, and nobility.

Whether before King Agrippa or Emperor Nero, his gospel was the same. Doubtless many scoffed in unbelief. But many heard and heeded. Somewhere in this wide range of the apostle's congregation you will find yourself. What will be your response to the message which he preached?

Third, note the message defined. The last verse of Acts reads "Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him [unhinderedly]" (v.31). Notice the two words "preaching" and "teaching." The word for "preaching" is not the one meaning to preach the gospel. It means to proclaim as a herald of the king. Paul is the herald of the King of kings proclaiming His Kingdom. This suggests his previous message to the Jews about the theocracy of God with the Messiah at its center (v.23). Then Paul taught concerning Jesus Christ as Lord. The word "teaching" means "discipling." As before, Paul related Jesus Christ to the Messiah of God's theocratic Kingdom. This he did for all who came to him, Jews, Romans, and Greeks. To those believing he taught the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

What a romantic picture! In Rome, the central city of the world, were two men, Nero and Paul. The one represented the autocratic rule of an empire. The other heralded the Kingdom of God. One symbolized oppression; one symbolized liberation. Luke says that Paul was "unhindered." Nero thought that he was unhindered. Nero on the throne; Paul in prison. The one destined to die a suicide. The other destined to die at the headsman's sword. Nero's name plumbed the depths of infamy. Paul's name continues to rise in power and brilliance. Why? Because Nero was a captive of the world, while Paul was a slave of Jesus Christ.

Again we are indebted to Dr. G. Campbell Morgan who raises the question as to our message for today. It is

to be that of the Kingdom of God, not the capricious will of kings, dictators, parliaments, or people. Not monarchy, not even democracy, but Theocracy, the Kingdom of God, the rule of God in the hearts of men. And this through "the Lord Jesus Christ." We can neither interpret nor shape history apart from Him. Nor can we understand Him apart from His cross, resurrection, and continuing reign. This was Paul's message in Rome. It is our message today — "heralding the Kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ."

And this must be "unhinderedly," neither by the opposition of governments or groups nor by the indolence of God's people. Paul and others of our forefathers in the faith paid a great price for an unhindered gospel. We must not lose it by defeat or by default.

One final word needs to be said to you as an individual. If the gospel is to do its work, it must not be hindered by your obstinate unbelief. Some who heard Paul gave the gospel free reign through their faith. Others bound it through their refusal to believe. For the one it was a savour of life unto life. For the other it was a savour of death unto death. Which shall it be in your heart? My prayer is that through your faith the gospel may be allowed to accomplish in you the work of salvation "unhinderedly."

Begin Praying For

