

Entering the Dragon's Lair **Acts 28:11-16**

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 1-17-2010

Introduction

When I think of Washington, DC, I think of it as one of the seven leverage points that Satan has captured in this nation. The seven leverage points are 1) the church, 2) civil government, 3) the arts and entertainment, 4) education, 5) business technology, 6) media, 7) and the family. And the church ought to be interested in all seven of those. But systematically Christian influence has evaporated in every one of them. Even the family is being torn apart and the church is losing the next generation. You don't need to remember all of those seven leverage points. For today it is important to realize that we cannot ignore the capitol of any state or nation.

And Washington, DC, needs our prayers because it is not only a command center for flesh and blood, it is also a command center for satanic principalities that have captured our nation. Have you ever wondered why good men get so quickly ensnared in every kind of iniquity there? Almost overnight conservative unbelievers seem to get corrupted. Why? It's because they are entering the dragon's lair, and are utterly unprepared for spiritual warfare. And they cave in. I've read testimonies of a couple "conservative" politicians who became Sodomites within a short time of arriving on Capitol Hill. They had never even thought of it before, but it became an incessant temptation once they got there. It is a place that is swarming with demons. That's why I call it the dragon's lair. And that's why we desperately need strong, well-disciplined Christians.

So I am very encouraged when leaders are beginning to take on Washington DC. This past week I got a letter from Ralph Drollinger, who is not only famous in the NBA but who is also the president of Capitol Ministries. He's a wonderful man with a real vision for taking the Gospel to civil magistrates. They are setting up chaplains in every state capitol. Our chaplain here in Nebraska is Perry Gauthier, a good friend of mine. And he's doing a wonderful job. And by the way, he could use financial support. But the president, Ralph Drollinger, is doing all that he can to establish a good beachhead in Washington, DC, as well as in Twenty South American country capitols. He's got an incredible vision. I don't believe this has ever been done before, and I am very excited about how these guys are going

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right into the power centers of these nations and seeking to capture that leverage point for Christ.

And that is exactly what Paul desired to do for several years – *long* before he had been captured in Jerusalem. His desire was to go into the capitol of the empire of Rome, the very lair of the dragon, and preach the Gospel. Well, in this week’s passage, he has finally arrived. And as we will see when we get to the end of this book, this is the beginning of the fulfillment of Daniel 2’s vision of Rome crumbling to the Gospel. And I’ve divided this passage up into four Ps. Plans, Places, People, and Prison.

I. Plans (v. 11)

Verse 11 says, “**After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figure-head was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island.**” I see three significant things in this verse: 1) the timing of their wintering, 2) the presence of this ship, and 3) the name of the ship.

Think first of all of the timing. They were winter-bound for three months, which, we saw last week, enabled Paul to evangelize and disciple Malta. It was *not* wasted time. But they would have been winter bound for the same three months no matter where they were in the Mediterranean. In chapter 27:12 it speaks of the ship’s plans to winter 800 miles east of Malta in Phoenix, Crete. That’s the farthest they thought they could make it that winter. And that would have been an OK place to winter, but God had other plans. He had been planning the conversion of Malta. And we have been looking at the hair-raising storm, and the zigzagging travel all across the Mediterranean Sea to that island. But if you look at the map that is in your outlines you can see that this storm blew them weeks ahead of schedule. If they had started traveling from Crete on February 8, which is the earliest date they could likely start travelling on the Mediterranean again, it would have set them back a long time. God overruled plans to His glory.

But think too, of the presence of the ship in Malta. If there had been no ship anchored in Malta, that *too* could have set them back a long time. If it had not been an *Alexandrian* ship, it may not have been big enough to carry them. The centurion would have needed to accompany all of the prisoners, so it is a remarkable providence that there *is* a ship wintered in Malta. So there are little details like this that have to be in place. Our God rules history. He causes Romans 8:28 to be true, not just for the apostle, but for you as well.

So we have two timing issues in chapters 27 and 28. In the beginning of chapter 27 God *slows the ship* down enormously so that Paul can minister

all along the coastline of Syria, Cilicia, Pamphylia and Lycia. He would not have gotten into any of those ports if the winds had not been against them. Those contrary winds forced the ship to where God wanted it to be. We saw that even the beginnings of churches were planted as a result of those slow-downs. It was God's slow-downs for the purpose of ministry.

Then of course we had the storm to prepare a boat to receive the Gospel, and to convert the island of Malta. That was a total overturning of a plan. But this storm also sped them up so that Paul could start his ministry in Rome much more quickly. Slowing down plans, spoiling our plans, and rushing our plans. We can trust God in all three scenarios. Yet how many times do we get frustrated with all three – upset with spoiled plans because we fail to see ourselves as stewards of God; upset with slow downs because we aren't looking with expectation to what God is doing; and anxious over being rushed because we are perhaps dreading the thing that is coming; we are not looking in faith. If there is any lesson that has been repeated over and over again in this book, it is the lesson that we can trust God's providential hindrances as well as His providential prosperings.



That doesn't mean we won't still have longings to achieve our plans. If you flip one page forward to Romans 1, you will see the longings that Paul had prior to getting to Rome. Let's read verses 8-15:

Romans 1:8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

Romans 1:9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,
Romans 1:10 making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.

Romans 1:11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established—

Romans 1:12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

Romans 1:13 ¶ Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles.

Romans 1:14 I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise.

Romans 1:15 So, as much as is in me, *I am* ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

Even the apostle had plans that were spoiled and/or slowed down. It's a hard balance to aggressively pursue your goals as Paul always did, yet to graciously submit to God's dealings with those plans. If you say, "Who cares?" you don't have Paul's balance. He cared a great deal. Some people take a "who cares" attitude, I think in part because they are trying to protect themselves from getting hurt. They don't want to care in case their plans don't work out. But it's OK to have Paul's passion for his plans.

Others give up at the least resistance, thinking, "I don't want to fight against God." They interpret every Providence as God saying "No," and they try to get out of the boxing ring. Little do they realize it, but it's not God who is their opponent in the ring. God is their boxing *coach* who keeps pushing them back into the ring. If you get frustrated, bitter, or angry with God, you are only hurting yourself and you are failing to realize that God is your fighting coach, not your opponent. He doesn't want you passively giving up. He doesn't want you hitting your head against a wall. Paul rolled with the punches, so to speak, but he still came up swinging, knowing that His coach was for him, helping him, and totally behind him. It didn't mean that Paul didn't get bloodied – he did. We saw some of the bloodying that he experienced during the storm. But how we relate to God when plans are spoiled, slowed down, or rushed, makes a big difference on whether we can still have joy in every situation. There may be some here this morning who really are beginning to wonder if God is your boxing opponent, and who want to give up. Even if you have been knocked down, trust God to get you through that boxing match. He is for you; He is not against you.

So there was the timing, there was the providential presence of the Alexandrian ship, and thirdly, there was the name of this ship. Luke said that the figurehead was the Twin Brothers. The New American Commentary says,

Ships often carried the figurehead of these two gods, who were Castor and Pollux, the sons of Zeus and Leda. They were venerated as the protectors of seamen. (Polhill, *Acts*, p. 535)

So the irony is that Paul is using one of the dragon's own ships to go into the dragon's lair. Paul is using the very means and plans that Satan had intended for bondage to bring liberty to the sons of men. And God does this over and over again down through history. It's so fascinating to read history from the perspective of God frustrating the plans of Satan. In the book of Esther He made Haman think he was winning, only to have Haman hung on his own gallows. I love the irony of Paul traveling on this ship devoted to the Roman gods in order to be part of the process of conquering Rome with the Gospel! Hallelujah! What a Savior! It's beautiful. And instead of cowering before the ships that are dedicated to the gods of our own generation, you need to be expecting God to be taking Satan down a peg or two through his own plans. We've got a God who is bigger than Satan. Amen?

II. Places (vv. 12-13)

Let's look next at the places that Paul was traveling past on his trip to Rome. Verse 12 says, "**And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days.**" We aren't told why they stayed there. Most people assume that the weather turned bad for three days. And there is good reason to believe that. This centurion would have to account for every step along the way when he arrived, and would not have had the option of just be stopping for a whim. So it must have been a necessity, like weather, or ship unloading, or ship repair, or something like that.

But God was in that stop at Syracuse. If you study the history of the church in that city, their tradition says that the centurion let Paul go ashore, and during those three days won some people to Christ, who formed the nucleus for the first church in Sicily. By the time the book of Acts was written, there was a church there that would have been so encouraged by these words. They would have realized that this was no accident – God was in the unfavorable wind that brought the Gospel to their doorstep. You see, if the savor of Christ is on you absolutely everywhere you go, you too will find that places, pit stops, restaurant engagements, can all be providential

appointments by God. We need to have our eyes open to God's presence in all of the places that we go to.

Verse 13 says, "**From there we circled round and reached Rhegium.**" This circling around is assumed by commentators to be tacking against a Northwest wind. God has constructed history in such a way that our actions and responsibilities are imperative. If these guys are going to get anywhere during that NW wind, they have to use their ingenuity by going way out, and then tacking back and forth in a circle to get to their destination. Don't think that circuitous routes that aren't pleasant are absent God's hand. But don't think that just because God controls all things, that we don't have to be creative and work hard.

Verse 13 continues, "**And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli.**" With a Northwest wind blowing through the straits between Sicily and Italy, it would have been impossible to sail through without risking the ship. So they have to wait. But after a one-day wait, they got a south wind that was perfect for sailing through the narrow channel. With the favorable wind, it was only another day to reach Puteoli. Puteoli was the drop off place for passengers, while the grain would go further north.

Just as a side note on places, Puteoli was 12 miles due west of Mount Vesuvius, a volcanic mountain, and about 13 miles due west of Pompeii, the resort town. If you know anything about the history of Pompeii, you know that in another 19 years Mount Vesuvius would blow, destroying Pompeii and everyone in it. And guess who some of the people were who were in it: Felix, Herod Agrippa, and their wives. The volcano killed every one of them. So God had the last word on the events of these last two chapters. But here's another interesting side note - God makes sure that Paul is not there when the volcano went off. You are invincible until it is God's timing for you to graduate to heaven. I love the translation in the ESV for Acts 13:36. It says. "**For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption.**" He couldn't die until he had *served God's purpose in his own generation*. Well, God has a purpose for your life too. I don't want to live one day longer than I will be useful for God's purpose for my life. I am content to fulfill God's purpose. And that was Paul's attitude in every place that he lived.

III. People (vv. 14-15)

Next I want to look at the people that God encouraged Paul with as he went into the dragon's lair. Verse 14 says, "...where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days." How encouraging to find brothers way out there in the middle of nowhere! Who would have thought that the Gospel would have reached Puteoli! But it had. We aren't told how, but it had. And for some reason the centurion lets Paul and the other Christians on board this ship stay in the homes of these brothers. We have no idea why they were allowed to do this. It could have been that the centurion was reporting to his superiors, and that government was just as slow back then as it is today. That's what one author suggested. But whatever the cause for the delay, God used it to give Paul and the other Christians a whole week of delightful companionship with these brethren. Pagans probably marvel that Christians can pick up an instant friendship with fellow believers wherever we may be found. But they can. Why? It is the presence of God's Holy Spirit in our hearts that draws us together.

When we have big battles to fight, God knows just when to bring the encouragement needed. And when you have huge battles that you are entering into, it is important that you not ignore the body of Christ. We are here to help, to encourage, to support, and to lift up. Pride can get in the way of being willing to be ministered to, but I think Paul stands as a model of both bearing our *own* burdens and being willing to have others bear *our* burdens. He ministered, but he was also ministered to.

The text continues: "**And so we went toward Rome.**" The distance is about 130 miles, and would take about five days by foot. Luke goes on to say, "**And from there [that is, from Rome], when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum, and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.**" This was Paul's triumphant entry into Rome. Returning generals might have received far more applause from far more numbers, but this genuine display of love deeply touched Paul's heart. The brothers who had gone all the way to the Appii Forum had travelled 43 miles from Rome. And there were brothers (perhaps from another church in Rome) who had travelled 33 miles to The Three Taverns. That's quite a trek for either group. But it was a way that they had of honoring Paul. Apparently word had been sent ahead by someone while they were in Puteoli, and a greeting delegation, eager to see Paul, could not wait for him to get to Rome. Now think of the contrast between the tepid reception that Paul got in Jerusalem compared to this delightful reception by the church in Rome. Let's think of that.

There are three lessons that I want to give to you from this scene of excited Christians escorting the prisoner, Paul. First was the boldness of the Christians to identify with Paul's chains. They didn't care that the soldiers might eye them with suspicion. "Hey! Are you identified with this criminal?" That could be scary if a Roman soldier said that to you. But they didn't care. They didn't care what the thousands of travelers on this road might think of them. They were bold for Christ, as we must be. They were not ashamed to identify with Paul's chains. Unfortunately, Philippians tells us that there had previously been Jews in Caesarea who were ashamed of his chains. They didn't want to be associated with Paul out of fear of what others might think. So that's the first lesson – a willingness to identify with God's people even when it is stressful; even when they might be in trouble with the law.

The second lesson I learn from these words is that these brothers in Christ went out of their way to honor and bless a leader. This has almost completely been lost in America. Americans don't know how to really honor their leaders, even within the church. It's so easy to tear down. And it's so easy to take leaders for granted. In fact, you might think of the spite that is hurled against so many famous leaders in America, like RC Sproul senior, RC Sproul junior, John MacArthur, Mark Driscoll, Doug Phillips, RJ Rushdoony, Peter Hammond, and many others. And we need to be careful that *we* don't hurl spite against Christian leaders that we disagree with, whether they are Arminian, Dispensational, or Charismatic. Bringing correction – yes, that is Biblical. But we need to be *for* the Christian leaders of the church. And you know, this is a two-way street. Scripture calls wives to honor their husbands, but it also calls husbands to honor their wives in 1Peter 3:7. Scripture calls Christians to honor their leaders, but it also calls leaders to honor the brotherhood in Romans 12:10 and 1Peter 2:17. And Paul was always a great example of that. There was not a single church Paul wrote to that he did not have some praise for the church. Paul corrected, yes, but he also went out of his way to look for good those people, and to bless them, praise them, and build them up.

It makes my heart ache when I see Christians tearing down each other rather than building up. It doesn't take much effort to write blogs or to utter just a few words that destroy a man's reputation, but no amount of work that these attacked leaders might do can truly restore their reputations. But what a blessing it could be if we were to send a check with a note of appreciation and blessing to even leaders that we disagreed with.

Just as one example, our church has sponsored a conference by a dear brother in the Lord who is a dispensationalist, Lutheran, who disagrees with is on a couple of the five points of Calvinism. And some people might think, “Horrors! You are letting a dispensational, Lutheran, semi-Calvinist, teach at your conference?” And we say, “Yes. There is so much we have in common, and so much good that he has to teach.” And let me tell you something, you will find this gentleman teaching at almost all of the so-called judgmental Reconstructionist conferences because they value what he has to say and he values what they have to teach. Down through the years we have sought to honor him for the enormous good that he does, and he has sought to honor leaders in our camp that he disagrees with. Obviously we have discussed those differences, but I love having him for conferences, and he loves working with us. If the whole body would have the attitude of these Roman Christians, who went out of their way to bless Paul, the church would be a wonderful testimony to the world. Pray that this would happen.

The third lesson I see from these verses is the incredible encouragement that the presence of brothers in each other’s lives can really be. The text says, “**When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.**” I wouldn’t doubt if he was brought to tears when he saw these delegations. And his heart must have been failing him, because the text says that he took courage. That means that he lacked courage earlier. Even strong men like Paul need encouragement.

While a *note* can be encouraging (and I have been very encouraged by some of you who have sent personal notes – and I thank you), personal *presence* by way of blessing is even more encouraging. This is one of the things that I love about this church – you love to hang out together. It blesses me to see you in each other’s homes, in my home, and hanging out at church till you have to be kicked out by the security guards. That’s a sign of healthy community. Just thinking about your love for each other sometimes brings me to tears. I love this church. So let me encourage you - don’t let the Jerusalem church be your model. Their focus was on their difference with Paul, and the difference was so little, and so sleight! But there is the tendency for Christians to latch on to some little difference and to be distant like at least some of the Jews in Palestine were with Paul. Of course, Paul just continued to love them, didn’t he? But my admonition to you is to imitate these Christians who sacrificed time and effort to come out of Rome to bless Paul. They were wonderful examples of how to be *for* each other.

IV. Prison (v. 16)

The last P in this passage is prison. Verse 16 says, **“Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.”** Luke doesn’t say what happened to the centurion, or Aristarchus or the other Christians. We saw that many of the newly converted prisoners were probably heading to the Coliseum to die. And Paul no doubt said his good byes to those new converts and encouraged them as they faced an uncertain future. It appears that the centurion himself had become fond of Paul, and perhaps had been converted. We don’t know. But as they enter Rome through the Porta Capena, Paul no longer sees these people he has travelled with for so long. He has a new soldier guarding him, and we will see next time that there is a whole new ministry that God opens up for him.

But I find Paul’s prison treatment to be encouraging. It is clear that Paul receives preferential treatment. God is setting Paul up in a place where he will be able to reach out to tens of thousands of people over the next two years. Though technically a prisoner, he is really only under house arrest. As we will see later on in this chapter, Paul will be free to entertain, preach, disciple, and do an incredible ministry from this house. In fact, the Jewish leaders whom he invites to this house won’t be able to persecute Paul because he will be under Roman protection. It’s ideal.

It’s true that he won’t be able to leave the house, so it is limiting him, but it will be all the liberty he needs to begin to see Rome crumbling to the Gospel. So we see a whole new set of P’s – a new plan for Paul, a new place, and a whole new set of people. And this is often the way God works in our lives even during difficult times. In fact, it is often the very difficulties that open up new P’s of God’s presence.

So in one sense it really isn’t prison, but I couldn’t think of any house-word that starts with P, and Paul is still a prisoner. But God is so powerfully at work that Paul is given maximum freedom. I can just imagine the talk at the soldiers’ barracks. “Ohhh, you’re assigned to Paul, eh? He’ll talk your head off. Watch out that he doesn’t convert you.” Or more than likely, there were soldiers coming back with lives changed who would be excited to be assigned to the apostle Paul once again. “What’s happened to Rufus? Ever since he was on duty with Paul he is different.” I’m sure that the conversation began to be more and more among fellow-believers as more and more soldiers become Christians and spread the faith throughout

Caesar's palace. What a great God we serve! Amen? He can turn prisons into comfortable homes, and hardened soldiers into defenders of the faith.

You may have your own prison that you are stewing in right now. It may be a prison of financial ruin. It may be a prison of huge responsibilities that you don't seem to be able to get your hands around. It may be the prison of a relationship that is not great. Whatever your prison might be, ask God to be in it. When God is in your prison you will have all the liberty that God wants you to have. It may not be as much as Paul had, but it will be all the liberty you will need to serve God effectively and joyfully. With God in the prison you can find yourself communing with Him, learning to trust Him more, learning how to delight in Him even when frustrations come. It will strengthen you. Don't see the negative things that have been happening to you as a reason to give up. See them as God's provision, and ask God what it is He wants you to do in this prison house.

Conclusion

If you have been feeling sorry for yourself lately, take the four P's in this passage seriously. Realize that it's a loving God who is in the ruined plans, the slowed down plans, and the plans that seem to be moving too quickly. He is in the places you visit. He is in the people thrown into your life. And He is in your prison, directing your steps.

We have people in this church who are hurting and who are struggling with every one of these points. It seems like every plan they make is getting turned upside down. Let's make sure that we bless them and encourage their hearts as a body. In fact, I would encourage us to go into prayer and fasting for some of our families. _____ especially needs God's supernatural intervention into his financial needs. But there are others like the _____s, and the _____s whom we can bless by being a *place* of God's grace, a *people* of blessing, and a reminder of God's presence in their time of prison. And may God receive the glory through the outcomes. Amen.

Entering the Dragon's Lair

Acts 28:11-16

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 1-17-2010

Introduction

- Let's value the people like Ralph Drollinger who are entering the dragon's lair too.
- Let's not be afraid when God calls us to do so.

I. Plans (v. 11)

- How do you handle ruined plans, slowed down plans, and plans that make you rush?
- What are some ways that God is currently using the "ships" dedicated to Satan *against* Satan?
- How do we avoid the extremes of 1) indifference, 2) giving up, 3) passivity, 4) bucking God's providence, 5) frustration/bitterness?
- When you are in the "boxing ring," do you treat God as the opponent or as the coach?



II. Places (vv. 12-13)

- What happened at Syracuse that turned it from a "delay," into an fantastic opportunity?
- Do you see God in even the inconvenient weather patterns?
- What would happen 13 miles east of Puteoli in another 19 years?

III. People (vv. 14-15)

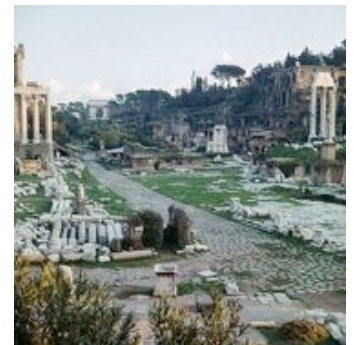
- Apparently two different churches in Rome met Paul. How far did the Christians who met Paul at Appii Forum have to travel? _____ miles. How far did the others have to travel to meet Paul at The Three Taverns? _____ miles.
- Lesson one: Being willing to id_____ with Paul even though he was in trouble with the law.
- Lesson two: These were Christians who knew how to h_____ their leaders.
- Lesson three: The incredible en_____ that Christian presence can bring to believers.



The Appian Way, 2009

IV. Prison (v. 16)

- Paul's prison was actually a launching pad for ministry. What are some negative "prisons" in your life that God might want you to think differently about?



Entering old Rome, 2009

Conclusion