

Proclaiming the Kingdom of God

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Everyone is familiar with the life story of the apostle Paul. He had an encounter with the resurrected Jesus while traveling. This changed everything. He became a believer in Jesus as the Messiah. He became a Christian. He became an apostle. In a letter to Timothy, Paul described himself as an example to those who would believe in the future: “But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (1 Tim. 1:16).

In the book of Acts, Luke focuses heavily on the ministry of Paul. Like all authors of the Bible, Luke was clever in his presentation of Paul. In the last section of Acts, Luke presents Paul as a symbol or representation of the Messiah. In so doing, Luke shows how Paul serves as an example to those who believe in Jesus. Notice the similarities between Jesus and Paul.

1. Both were arrested and subjected to trials.
2. Jesus was put to death. Paul suffered a shipwreck.
3. Jesus was raised from the dead. Paul was saved from the sea.
4. The resurrected Lord taught the disciples. Paul preached the Gospel in Rome.

Paul providentially went through these events and finally got to Rome. Notice the last scene in Luke’s book: “He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:30-31).

Similarly, believers in Christ are to share in His death and resurrection. We are to be baptized, even as Paul was earlier in his life (Acts 9; Rom. 6:1-4). This is how we die to sin and receive new life. The last scene of Paul in the book of Acts helps us better understand what we are to do with our new life.

How Paul Spent His Days

1). House arrest. A Jewish rabbi turned follower of Jesus had no political leverage with Roman Emperor, Nero. Nero was in no hurry to hear Paul’s case. Paul had to wait for two years. Thankfully, he was not imprisoned. He had a measure of liberty but was not completely free. He had to find housing at his personal expense.

Similarly, we have a measure of liberty. We have been given new life by faith in Christ; yet we remain living in a fallen world. We are subjected to suffering. Our faith and ministry will cost us.

During an earlier imprisonment, Paul wrote, "I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account" (Phil. 1:23-24).

Of course, being with our Lord would be far better than our present existence. However, we must live in the world. While we struggle, our lives have a purpose. Paul knew his purpose and sacrificially lived it to its full potential.

2). Paul welcomed everyone who came to visit him. Under the circumstances, Paul was happy to have people visit him. Being under house arrest in a strange place must have been difficult. Yet, he found opportunities to teach and share the good news of Jesus. From an earlier prison epistle, he wrote, "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ" (Phil. 1:12-13).

A welcoming person has a special perspective. There is much we can learn from Paul's disposition. We need to be looking for opportunities to share the Gospel, even under difficult circumstances.

3). Paul preached boldly. Not everyone who came to visit Paul believed his message. Luke described his visits:

"And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: "'Go to this people, and say, "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, 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 listen." (Acts 28:24-28).

As Christians, we must be bold and uncompromising with the Gospel. If one person rejects the Gospel, we must find another who will listen. People rejecting the Gospel is discouraging. Yet, we must be resilient. Our purpose in life is to proclaim the kingdom of God.

Conclusion

We do know how Paul's life came to an end. Paul's letters to Timothy give a deeper sense of the seriousness of his situation. He wrote, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

While there is hope in what Paul writes to Timothy, there is also an unavoidable sadness to it. Luke's account, however, does not address Paul's issues of life and death. Instead, the last scene of his book describes the apostle Paul spending his days proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. With faith in Jesus and the hope of eternal life, may we spend the rest of our days boldly proclaiming the kingdom of God.