

45. Freedom through Christ

June 29, 2014

I know that because of my facial features and accents some of you have a real hard time believing that I am not from Southern Sweden, I am actually a Korean – born in Seoul, South Korea.

In 1945, Korea was liberated from Japanese Imperial military that occupied Korea for 36 long years, by two main forces – the South was liberated by Americans and the North by Soviet Union.

I was born three years after the Korean Civil War between South Korea and North Korea that dragged in the U.S. and 15 other allied countries against North Korea, China, and Soviet Union from 1950 till 1953.

If you asked my generation and older South Koreans regarding the true concept of freedom, you would get the same basic answer as from those who fought for their freedom against the British Redcoats during the American Revolutionary War from 1775 till 1783. I believe that George Washington eloquently spoke about freedom for all of us:

“The time is near at hand which must determine whether Americans are to be free men or slaves.”

Apostle Paul was in the Caesarea Roman prison without a charge for two years before he was on board the ship to Rome. It took over six months to travel from Caesarea to Rome. Once he arrived at Rome, he didn't get to see Caesar for several years. Though he was a prisoner of Rome, he was more free than the Roman governors of Judea, soldiers, and even Caesar Nero himself because he received the true freedom through Christ.

The worst kind of situation regarding freedom is not realizing that you are not free and a slave of someone. The apostle was trying to tell the people who came to his rented house about freedom through Jesus Christ. I believe that the Lord is going to teach all of us about it as well.

A. ROME, FINALLY

Acts 28:11-16 After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island. 12 And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days. 13 From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli, 14 where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome. 15 And from there, 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. 16 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.

After three months in Malta to pass the winter season, Paul's group was on board another Alexandrian ship to travel to Rome. It was 95 miles to Syracuse which was the capital city of Sicily, another 73 to Rhegium, and about 204 to Puteoli, the port of Naples. This time the “south wind” was exactly what they needed in order to make the voyage quickly and safely.

In Puteoli, Paul and his friends, along with Julius and the other prisoners and guards, were urged by the believers to stay and rest for a week; and Julius gave his permission. The centurion knew that Paul had saved their lives, and perhaps he was even getting interested in what this Christianity had to offer.

Centurion Julius and his group took the famous Appian Way and traveled 125 miles from Puteoli to Rome. The first group of Christians met Paul at Appii Forum, about 33 miles from Rome; and the second group met him at the Three Inns, 20 miles from the city. Somehow word had gotten to Rome that Paul was coming; how, we do not know. I can see why Paul was encouraged to see his friends who traveled all that way to greet Paul.

Just as the Lord Jesus promised twice, Paul arrived at Rome finally. The city Rome had two million people – more than a half of them were slaves. And the vast majority of them had never heard of the name of Jesus. He was able to stay in his own rented house for two years.

B. PAUL'S MINISTRY IN ROME

Amazingly, God intends to use the limitations of the situation itself as a platform for the Gospel. Paul's chains became the medium for God's message of freedom. I see at least three opportunities that came from Paul's chain:

1) Since Paul couldn't go to the people with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the people came to him.

Acts 28:17 And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: "Men and brethren, though I have 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,

Whenever Paul came to a new city, it was his routine to visit and preached to the Jews in the local synagogue. In Rome, however, he had invited the Jews to his rented house, and they were willing to come to listen to him.

2) Since Paul couldn't change what others were saying about him, he simply told the truth.

Acts 28:18-29 who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. 19 But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. 20 For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain." 21 Then they said to him, "We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. 22 But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere." 23 So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. 24 And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. 25 So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, 26 saying, 'Go to this people and say: "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive; 27 For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their

ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.” 28 “ Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.

He couldn't change the charges that were made against him by the Jews in Caesarea, but he could explain the truth to the Jews in Rome as they gathered at his room.

Paul's greatest concern was his witness to the Jews in Rome. The apostle made it clear that his appeal to Caesar must not be interpreted as an indictment against his nation. Actually, he was a prisoner on behalf of his nation and "the hope of Israel."

Paul combed through the OT prophecies that pertained to the Messiah from His birth to death and the resurrection and explained to them how Jesus Christ fulfilled every one of them. What a study that must have been! Why did Paul not record the whole teaching? He could make MP3 or DVD files of his teaching and sell them from Amazon.com. I'd buy the entire set, wouldn't you?

So what was the result of Paul's teaching? Some were persuaded and some were not. When the Jewish leaders left Paul's house, they were still arguing among themselves. But Paul had faithfully given his witness to the Jews in Rome, and now he would turn to the Gentiles.

Apostle Paul quoted Isaiah 6:9-10 to these men, words that described their tragic spiritual condition. Jesus had used this passage in connection with His parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8. The Apostle John in his Gospel applied them to Israel in chapter 12, and Paul quoted them in his Roman epistle as well.

It is one thing to listen and quite something else to hear, and there is a great difference between seeing and perceiving. If anybody should have possessed spiritual understanding, it was these Jewish leaders, but their hearts were dull and hard. Too often those who enjoy the most spiritual privileges are not ready when they must make spiritual decisions.

Right now, some of you might be in the exact same situation as these Jewish leaders. You heard the Word of God, but your hearts are dull, your spiritual ears and eyes are closed because of your own stubbornness and pride. The Bible knew that you would do that. So it says in the Book of Psalms and Hebrews:

Psalm 95:8 Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as in the day of trial in the wilderness,

When people reject the salvation of God, they do not make the salvation of no effect. It just means that God would find those who would hear it and accept it. It is their loss, not God's.

Remember what I said at the opening of this sermon? The worst kind of situation regarding freedom is not realizing that you are not free and a slave of someone. If you are not a born-again Christian, you are a slave of your own sin and Satan. You just don't know that you are.

Without the freedom through Christ, the freedom you have physically is the only taste of heaven on earth.

In just a few years after Paul's rebuke of those Jews who rejected Jesus, the Jewish people of Judea were slaughtered wholesale and Jerusalem was destroyed. God's judgment was coming, and part of Paul's frustration was that he sensed this.

The same goes for the United States. Since 1960, America has been continuously rejecting God's name from every corner of the society. His judgment is already on this country and will be completed very soon. President Obama and his administration are doing superb jobs in ruining this country.

Some of you may not like what I just said about the political thing from the pulpit. You cannot separate how you vote from how you follow God, because our everyday life should reflect our faith in Jesus Christ, not just Sundays. I like what Abraham Lincoln said about this: "America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves."

3) Since Paul couldn't unchain himself from the Roman guard, he used his situation as an object lesson in many ways.

During these two years, Paul had time to write letters to several churches – the churches of Ephesus, Colossi, Philippi, and to his friend Philemon. From the letter to the Ephesians we learned the glory of Jesus Christ; from the letter to the Philippians we learned about the unspeakable joy in the midst of hardships and trials; from the letter to the Colossians we learned the preeminence and excellency of Jesus Christ; from the letter to Philemon, we learned the glorious intercessory work of Jesus.

Can you picture Paul staring at the Roman guard who was chained to him as he was writing a letter to the fellow believers of Ephesus about the Full Armor of God? I am sure that the guard was a bit embarrassed by Paul's stare and said, "What?"

C. EPILOGUE

Acts 28:30 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

These two years were not wasted, and God didn't waste Paul's time in Rome. God never wastes our time, though we may waste it by not sensing God's purpose for our lives at the moment.

According to the extra biblical record, Paul was released and he resumed his ministry, even traveling as far as Spain. During this period, A.D. 63-66 or 67, he wrote letters to Timothy and Titus. Around Year 67, Paul was arrested again, and this time his situation was changed drastically. He did not live in a house, but was chained in the Mamertine Prison and treated as a regular criminal.

But the saddest thing about this second imprisonment was his being forsaken by the believers in Rome according to 2 Timothy 4. The great apostle to the Gentiles was abandoned by the very people he came to assist. He said,

2 Timothy 4:11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.

Can you feel his loneliness?

There is no end to the Book, because the history of the church continues this story on and on through the centuries. Trusting in Jesus, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, and the guidance of the Father, the Word of God will continue to spread without hindrance and continue to change lives for the glory of God. The Book of Acts really is a never-ending story.

D. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Freedom through Christ give us the eternal hope in Him, no other way can do that.

- 2) Freedom through Christ is rejected by those who choose to remain as slaves of satan without knowing that he or she is.