

## **The Story – Chapters 30: *Paul’s Final Days***

### **Introduction**

Last week, we looked at Paul’s missionary journeys, and this last Sunday we examined the good news in its most basic form as described by Paul – God loves us just that way we are, and nothing can separate us from that love. This week we look at Paul’s last days and how he “finished the race.”

If you want to read this material in the Bible, you can find it in Acts 20-23, 27-28; Ephesians 1-6; and 2 Timothy 1-4. Note that while Ephesians and 2 Timothy are both purported to be written by Paul, most scholars agree that 2 Timothy was written in Paul’s name by someone else after his death to address a situation that did not come up during Paul’s lifetime. (Writing in another’s name was a relatively accepted practice at that time.) Although not as clear, many scholars also believe that Ephesians was written in Paul’s name after his death by a student of Paul’s theology.

### **Summary of Chapter 30 – Paul’s Final Days**

If one could earn frequent traveler miles two thousand years ago, Paul might hold a record. After spending nearly three years in Ephesus, according to Acts, he retraced his steps through Greece and Macedonia before docking in Miletus. There, he summoned the Ephesian elders for a tearful and final farewell. He charged them with shepherding the church of God. After a brief stay with Philip in Caesarea, Paul headed for Jerusalem, knowing that chains awaited him there.

Paul seemed to always be able to stir up a controversy. Just walking into the temple court stirred up trouble. The Jews tried to kill him in Jerusalem, so the Roman authorities stepped in to arrest him. While being taken into custody, Paul gave his testimony before an angry crowd. The Roman commander brought him before the Sanhedrin to get some answers, but that only made the problem worse. Paul remained in protective custody and was transferred to Caesarea’s higher court where he remained for two years before appealing to Caesar.

When Paul wrote to the church in Rome while still on his missionary journeys, he told them that he planned to visit them. He probably did not anticipate his “fourth missionary journey” to be under these circumstances. Paul set sail to Rome in a ship but warned the crew that sailing on in bad weather would be disastrous. They continued anyway, and conditions became hurricane force winds off the coast of Crete, driving their ship every which way. Weeks later the storm had not weakened, but all thoughts of survival surely had. Food was low, gear was gone, hope was gone. What seemed like a bad episode of Gilligan’s Island became unlikely opportunities for Paul to talk about God.

The next morning, they arrived safely ashore on Malta where the islanders showed exceptional hospitality. When Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake without incident, the people thought he was either a criminal or a god. Paul healed many of the locals during their winter stay there. Three months later they were finally able to set sail for Rome.

Paul was greeted by believers at the port of Puteoli, modern day Pozzuoli, about 150 miles south of Rome. They encouraged him and he spent a week there before traveling on. When the Roman Christians heard he was coming, they joined him for the final forty miles of his trek to Rome where Paul was confined to house arrest under the supervision of a soldier. Paul invited the Jewish leaders to come to his house. There he told them about his conflict with the Jerusalem Jews and the fulfillment of the Scriptures by Jesus. Some believed, but others rejected his message.

Although not reflected in Acts, Christian tradition has it that in AD 64, the Great Fire of Rome burned much of the city, and rumors quickly spread that Emperor Nero had started the fire to facilitate a building project. Needing a scapegoat, he blamed the Christians. Imprisonments and executions followed for anyone bearing the name of Christ. In AD 67/68, Paul was beheaded in Rome.

### Discussion Questions

As you read, remember there are discussion questions for Chapter 30 are on page 487 of the book and also questions that can be found on *The Story* bookmark (which is also on our website). Also, feel free to consider some of the questions below:

1. Review Paul's personal testimony that he gave to the Jews from the steps of the barracks (p. 442- 443, Acts 21:37-22:21). What's your story of God getting ahold of you? How do you feel sharing your story with others? What difficulties do you have sharing? What would help you to become bolder?
2. Which unlikely situations did Paul use as opportunities for evangelism in this chapter? What are some unlikely situations in your own life that can be used as opportunities to share the story of God in your life?
3. Much like in the story of Queen Ester, God is mightily at work behind the scenes in the details of Paul's journey. What evidence of God's grace and sovereignty can you find in Paul's arrests, trials and travels? What does that mean for you in your own journey of faith and life?
4. Review Ephesians 5:21-33 (p. 455). What does it teach us about the relationship between Jesus and the church? How may the image of a husband and wife be helpful to imagine Christ and the church? How may it be unhelpful? By Christ's example, how does Ephesians challenge human notions of power and authority in relationships (see also Mark 9:35)?
5. 2 Timothy portrays Paul as an apostle who was not only a proclaimer of the gospel but one who was willing to suffer for it. Paul is portrayed as the ideal Christian and apostle. What does Paul's life teach you about suffering? If you, like Timothy, had been asked to suffer for the gospel, what might have been your response?
6. 2 Timothy also reminds its readers of the need to persevere in the work of preparing a future generation of Christian servants using the illustrations of a soldier, athlete, and farmer (p. 457, 2 Timothy 2:1-7). How might each illustration help Timothy fulfill his call while facing hardships? How might they help us serve God today?