

2021 World Mission Report

PAUL IN HIS RENTED HOUSE

Acts 28:11-31

Key verses 28:30-31

“For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Praise our holy God that he has mercy on us and sent his only Son Jesus! Praise God that he regards our faith in Jesus as our righteousness and gives us eternal life. In particular, we praise our Lord that he established our community 60 years ago and has powerfully evangelized the world through the ministry of campus discipleship. Today, we earnestly pray that through the passage of Acts 28, God may renew his will and vision upon us.

After his 3rd missionary journey, apostle Paul returned to Jerusalem, where he was arrested while purifying himself at the temple. Paul was sent to Caesarea because of the conspiracy of assassination of the Jews. While on trial, he appealed to the Roman emperor, Caesar. So it was after 2 years of imprisonment in Caesarea that Paul left for Rome by ship in order to stand trial before the Emperor. This was around autumn in AD 60. His ship encountered a hurricane in the Adriatic Sea and fell into great danger. The ship was wrecked. However, Paul and his companions safely landed on the shore of Malta. On the island, Paul was bitten by a viper yet remained unharmed. The islanders thought he was a god. Through this incident, Paul was welcomed by Publius, the chief official of the island. Publius's father was sick in bed, and Paul placed his hands on him and healed him. When this happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured by Paul. As a result, they served Paul and his companions with honor in many ways (28:7-10). In this way, Paul wintered in the island for three months.

After three months, Paul put out to sea, and landed at Syracuse to stay there three days. They left Syracuse with the south wind, crossed the strait in the north, and via Rhegium, reached Puteoli. Puteoli was a harbor city located in the south east of Rome, and Paul was going to walk from there. At Puteoli Paul found some brothers who invited him to spend a week with them. While Paul was staying at Puteoli, the news that he arrived in Italy spread to Rome. At the news, the brothers in Rome traveled to meet Paul. They came as far as the Forum of Appius, which was 64 km from Rome, and the Three Taverns, which was 53 km. At the sight of them, Paul deeply gave thanks to God for safely arriving there. He was also greatly encouraged and strengthened by them. Together with the brothers, Paul walked the Via Appia to Rome.

The Via Appia was a famous road which connected Rome to Brindisi, the harbor town of the Puglia Region. It was constructed in the era of the ancient Roman Republic and was called the Queen of Roads. Through this road, the Romans went out to conquer the world. The generals returned to Rome from their victorious campaigns. Yet now, Paul, as a victorious spiritual general, was on the road to conquer Rome with the gospel. A spiritual revolution was about to take place in the Roman Empire.

When Paul arrived in Rome, he was given a special favor by the royal court. He was granted a permission not to be in the public prison with other prisoners, but to live by himself with a soldier to guard him. The reason for this favor seemed to have been because he was a Roman

citizen still on an uncompleted trial. He had also saved the lives of Roman soldiers and the centurion. This was God's grace and providence. The place where he was imprisoned was his own rented house. This was God's destination for Paul when he had started his journey to Rome.

What then did Paul do as the first thing in his rented house? He called together the leaders of the Jews in Rome. When they had assembled, Paul humbly explained about the rumor they had heard. He clearly said that he had never done anything against his people or against the customs of his ancestors. He told them that even the Romans who had examined him wanted to release him, but because of the opposition of the Jews, Paul had been compelled to appeal to Caesar. Paul did not remain quiet doing nothing just thinking that his conscience was clear before God. He gently explained himself to the Jews in order to dispel any misunderstanding about him.

Paul told them the reason why he was on trial. "For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain." (20) He was in chains because of the hope of Israel. The Jews were waiting for a political Messiah. They waited for the restoration of Israel from the Roman occupation, and their nation becoming powerful and wealthy like that of King David's. This was the hope of the Jews. Yet the hope God gave them was not such a political one. The hope of Israel God gave was not a temporal and earthly hope, but a true one that saves them from their sin and death. It was the hope to raise those who are dead in sin, and bring them into the eternal kingdom of God (Ac 24:15). Paul knew this very well. Therefore, Paul had testified to the truth of salvation through faith in Jesus' death and resurrection. This gospel was given not only to the Jews but also to all the Gentiles, and the salvation was given not through keeping the law, but through faith in Christ. Amen. Because Paul testified to the true hope of Israel, he was persecuted by the Jews, and as a result, he ended up being in chains.

The Jews replied that they had not received any letters from Judea concerning Paul, and none of the brothers had come to say anything bad about him. All they knew was that people everywhere were against the sect Paul followed (21-22). So, they arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening Paul explained and declared to those who came to see him. He explained and declared about the kingdom of God. He also tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.

Paul's teaching was spiritual and clear. Yet most of the Jews did not accept his teaching. They disagreed among themselves and began to leave Paul. So, Paul made a final statement to them. "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: 'Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'" (25b-27) This had been given to the Israelites who were about to be destroyed by the Babylonians. God gave them the warning that if they would not repent, they would surely perish. God wanted his people to repent and come back to him. God appealed to them "Come to me! Come to me!" "Turn! Turn!" If they would understand and turn, God had promised that he would heal them. Yet they did not turn and fell into the hands of Babylon.

Quoting the words from the book of Isaiah, Paul was giving the same warning to the Jews who were rejecting the gospel now. In spite of their rejection, Paul was not in despair. He accepted

their rejection as God's sovereignty, and said to them, "Therefore, I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" Paul accepted God's will that because of the rejection of the Jews, the gospel was sent to the Gentiles. He believed that the Gentiles would listen.

What then did Paul do? Verses 30-31 tell us. "For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul's trial did not resume for 2 years. This was because the accusers did not show up at the court, due to the lack of evidence. But most of all, there was God's will in this. It was God's will that Paul teach the word in his own rented house without any hindrance. Paul welcomed all those who came to him and taught the word. He did not quarrel or get emotional, but quietly and persistently planted the word in the hearts of the people. For two whole years, boldly and without hindrance, he taught the word of God. Here, we learn several important points.

First, he did not allow himself to be restricted by his imprisonment. Even though he had some freedom within the house, it was still a prison that he could not leave. He was still under house arrest. He was physically confined. His health was not good. He had a bad eyesight that he needed a scribe to write for him. He was physically suffering from an illness which he described to be like a thorn in his flesh. His own people, the Jews, opposed him. In these circumstances, he could have easily given up saying, "I cannot do anything. I just have to wait for an opportune time. Just pray for me that I may be released as soon as possible!" Yet he trusted in God's good will in all things and maintained an optimistic perspective. When he did so, his rented house turned out to be the best place.

In his rented house he did not need to work, for instance, make a tent. He was able to serve God's work there full-time. Every day the Roman government provided him with food and lodging. They provided him with rotating soldiers to guard him. The soldiers protected Paul from the persecution of the Jews. Also, he did not need to chase after the people to teach the word. They came to him to listen to the word. Most of all, the guards were his steady Bible students. Paul found these good points of staying in his rented house and did his best with a thankful heart. He welcomed all those who came to him. He welcomed all, the Jews and the Gentiles, men and women, and the freemen and the slaves. He overcame the limitation of his house arrest and taught there the word of God for two whole years.

Second, even though he could not go out, the word he preached went out of the house. In the past, while Paul was pioneering Ephesus, he just stayed in the lecture hall of Tyrannus for two years, and taught his disciples the word of God. At that time, he experienced the word of God spread widely and grew in power, and as a result, all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. At that time, he was convinced that the gospel could surely conquer Rome (Ac19:21). He said in 2 Timothy 2:9 "for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained." Even though he was chained, he believed the word of God was not chained, and he faithfully preached the word in his rented house.

Also, he wrote the famous Captivity Epistles, namely, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. His faith in the power of God's word was realized in reality. The gospel spread throughout the whole palace guard and to many who belonged to Caesar's household (Php 1:13; 4:22). In AD 313, the Emperor Constantine the Great proclaimed that Christianity, which was

hitherto persecuted, was to be permanently tolerated within the Roman Empire. In AD 391 the Emperor Theodosius I declared Christianity as the official state religion. The gospel Paul preached in his rented house went out and conquered the Roman Empire, and through the Roman Empire, changed the course of history of the whole world.

Third, Paul preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. He preached the kingdom of God. This kingdom of God is God's ultimate gift and best blessing for us. However, many people in the world are spiritually blind and cannot see it. They seek the world's success and pleasure just pursuing visible things. Yet, everything in the world is temporal and will eventually vanish without a trace. They cannot be our true hope. Only the kingdom which God gives us is the eternal kingdom of everlasting life where there will be no pain, no sin, and no death. The apostle Peter also praises God who gives us the kingdom as our true hope. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you." (1Pe 1:3,4)

Our Lord Jesus, through his death and resurrection, saves us from eternal destruction and gives us the kingdom of God. In order to receive the kingdom we must believe that Jesus is our Lord and Christ. Whoever repents of their sin, and accepts Jesus as their Lord and Christ enters the kingdom of God. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Ac 4:12) May God help us to put our hope in his eternal kingdom and continue to preach the true hope of all men.

Fourth, we find an exemplary model of the house church from Paul's ministry. Paul's rented house was not a temple or a worship hall. It was his residence. In the house, he ate and slept. He studied the word and met people. The people came to his house and saw how he lived spending time together with him. In short, he served a house church ministry. In our community, we have more than 400 chapters worldwide. Some chapters are big yet most of them are house churches. Some people think that because they are the only one house church in their region, they therefore cannot effectively serve the gospel ministry. Of course, many co-workers co-operating together surely help raising disciples. However, it is not impossible for a house church to do it. Look at the example of Paul. He invited people to his house and taught them one by one. He believed that the word planted in their hearts, would surely grow and expand whether he was conscious of it or not. His rented house was the best place for the purpose of serving the ministry of planting God's word.

In 1993, I was sent to London, England as a pioneering lay missionary. The shipping company I worked for sent me to London. For the first few years, my family was the only house church, and we held Sunday worship services and Bible studies at home. It was never easy to invite a college student to my home. For the first two whole years, I could not invite a single student to my home. One day around Spring in 1995, one art student from London University accepted our invitation. When he came to my home, my two daughters joyfully welcomed him, and my wife served him with delicious English traditional food. At that time, I saw that his heart was widely opened. Our heartfelt welcoming him helped a suspicious student feel that he was received as a family member. I experienced a house church ministry was a great environment where we can show our lives and our genuine love.

He loved the word. My weekly Bible study with him in my small two-bedroom apartment, like Apostle Paul's rented house, was full of grace. Yet, he felt burdened by the Sunday worship

service in my home and did not attend it for 3 years. Anyway, as I did not have any other Bible student, I concentrated on teaching him in order to raise a disciple. After 3 years of faithful Bible study, the word planted in his heart gradually changed him. He came to attend our home worship service and grew into a Bible shepherd. Now, he pioneers a chapter as a professor shepherd. Through him God also raised Paul, our London UBF director, and other national leaders, and established a national leadership in England. I have still been studying the Bible with him every week for the last 26 years since our first one-to-one study in 1995, and we are growing together. English leaders and missionaries have been faithful in teaching the word of God with a long term vision to make the country once again a great nation of Bible shepherds. The word of God the Apostle Paul planted in the hearts of the people spread, and in 250 years, conquered the Roman Empire. This great work of God got started from Paul's house church ministry. May God help us to have faith in the ministry of house church and faithfully serve one-to-one Bible studies trusting in the power of God's word.

The book of Acts ends the last chapter with Paul's ongoing preaching. The passage gives us the impression that Paul is still preaching the gospel boldly and without hindrance in his rented house. Doesn't it? Our Lord is writing Acts chapter 29 through Paul's spiritual descendants. In particular, 60 years ago, God established our UBF community in order to preach the gospel of salvation to all campus students in Korea and the world. In 1961, right after the 4.19 revolution and the 5.16 military coup, the young people in Korea were in deep despair. Not only politically but also economically, Korea was one of the most underdeveloped and poorest countries in the world. In such a country, God raised the late Dr. Samuel Lee and Mother Sarah Barry as the founders of our community and as our spiritual parents. Through them the Lord gave the word of God to many campus students in this poor and fatalistic country, and planted God's hope and vision. God gave them the vision that they would become Bible shepherds and missionaries, and the country would become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Many young people accepted God's vision in their hearts and got up from their mats of poverty and fatalism. They accepted the call for world mission through raising disciples, and decided to give their lives to God. They gave up everything and went to faraway foreign lands without any security for their future.

So far, through our community, God has raised more than 1,800 self-supporting missionaries and sent them over 100 countries in the world. I believe it is one of the most glorious events ever in the history of the country that so many missionaries went out to serve the whole world. That powerful work was entirely compelled by the grace of God and through the driving force of the Holy Spirit. That we have been used in this life saving ministry was purely by God's grace. At this time, we give thanks, praises and glory to God that he has used weak and unworthy sinners like us so preciously!

When we look back on the past 60 years, our future direction becomes very clear. It is that we continue to devote ourselves to raising campus disciples of Jesus through one-to-one Bible study like the Apostle Paul. These days, we feel very restricted by COVID-19. But in God there is no restriction. We are bound yet God's word is not bound. The word of God has life and, night and day, whether we sleep or get up, it grows and expands to accomplish what God desires. (Isa 55:11) The word of God makes people be born again. (1Pe 1:23) The word is the mighty power of God that gives salvation. Therefore, let us pray that we may repent of our negative, complacent, lukewarm hearts, and earnestly pray to fully give ourselves to raising disciples in the campuses of the world.

Of course, our commitment and zeal does not automatically produce the work of the Spirit. Yet, giving ourselves fully to the work of God by teaching the word in itself is our act of giving our hearts to God and demonstrating our faith in God. We believe that God will surely accept our prayers and faith which are revealed through our devotion to one-to-one. Specifically, I pray that each house church or chapter may earnestly pray and serve two times of weekly one-to-one Bible studies of their Sunday worship attendees. May God accept our decision and grant us once again the powerful work of the Spirit that brings a spiritual revival. May God raise 100,000 missionaries by 2041 and send them out to all the campuses in 233 countries including the unpioneered 140 nations of the world! Through all these, may the glory of God's grace, mercy and almighty power be revealed! Amen!