**RENEW TOGETHER Week 3:**

Today is the last of 3 weeks of Renew Together – raising awareness of our missionaries overseas and supporting them in prayer and financially.

We have looked at headings of Head, and heart in the previous weeks Today we focus on Action: Stepping into God’s Call

**Video** In this week’s video we hear about the work of JOYYA in India. We see how the call and hope of God has led people to step out in faith. Through this, we see that transformation and change is on the move!

We have been reading through the book of Acts, looking at Paul’s journeys around the Mediterranean. Through Paul’s journeys of proclamation - even in times of trials- the Gospel was spread, and Gentiles heard the call of God to be included in this kingdom community.

Our focus today in on Acts 22-25

In Acts 22:1-22 we see that Paul presented his case and shared his conversion story. He did not disguise or sugarcoat the facts. He shared the good and the bad. He related how he persecuted the church and was on his way to continue doing so when he encountered the risen Jesus and came to faith on the road to Damascus. Paul owned where he has been but went on to show how Jesus now owned him.

We continue from vv23 *As [the Jews] were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, 24 the [Roman] commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. 25 As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?” …”I was born a citizen”. 29 Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.*

After that, the commander heard that there was a plot to kill Paul and transferred him to Caesarea to come before the court of the governor Antonius Felix.

*23 Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, “Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. 24 Provide horses for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix.”*

It must have a very serious threat to have that level of security.

In the court, Felix heard what Paul had to say.

*24:25 As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, “That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.” … 27 When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favour to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.*

The saga of accusations by the Jews and procrastination by the ruling Roman officials continued. He is eventually brought before Festus.

Before Festus, Paul proclaimed: 25:10 *“I appeal to Caesar!” 12 After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!”*

Paul was not afraid to use his citizenship for his protection and as a way of getting himself in front of high-ranking Roman officials[[1]](#footnote-1) .

He was never afraid to preach the gospel message.

At each point in this ordeal, he defended himself but also proclaimed his faith in the crucified and risen Jesus.

In Acts 26:12-23 Paul again retold his story to King Agrippa. This retelling focused on the words of Jesus and his command to Paul, emphasising that Paul has been divinely commissioned to proclaim the message for which he is being accused.

Paul used the Roman legal system as a platform on which to proclaim the gospel and point to Jesus the answer to God’s promises – an answer to both Jew and Gentile alike.

Paul’s work is a response to the promptings of heaven, not his own initiative. His work in the eastern Mediterranean was testament to his faithfulness to this calling[[2]](#footnote-2)

Paul was a faithful witness, believer, and Israelite. Paul challenged Agrippa and others with the fact of Jesus’ Messiahship and his (Paul’s) change of heart and subsequent obedience, which prompted Agrippa to say

26:28 *… “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”29 Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.”*

Paul does not offer a legal defence or a rebuttal; he does not remain silent – instead, he stands tall and preaches a challenging prophetic sermon, speaking not in legal terms but in personal terms. He was not afraid to challenge the authorities, not arguing against the charges, but rather for the Lordship of the messiah Jesus[[3]](#footnote-3) .

In Acts 27-28:15 we learn that Paul and the Roman soldiers escorting him to Rome were shipwrecked in Malta. Earlier, Roman leaders had pointed to Paul’s innocence. Now his innocence seems to be backed up by God and creation and Paul’s survival of life-threatening tests (storm, shipwreck, and snakebite), enhancing Paul’s stature and marking him out as a hero[[4]](#footnote-4)

Paul was probably the most seasoned traveller on board the ship: 11 voyages on the Mediterranean before this one (3,500+ miles). People looked to him for help. Yet it was also Paul’s faith and his character that saw him seen as a leader in this tough situation[[5]](#footnote-5)

He called for them to keep up their courage, to stay together and to take food. He was a man of faith and action, of Spirit and of common sense.

Rome was far away, an ominous centre of power, there were many risks on the way, yet Paul arrived safely – God was with him all the way. Paul was delivered from danger and adversity.

In Acts 28:16-31 we learn that Paul arrives in Rome at last.

When Paul finally arrives in Rome and faces trial he again points to his deep hope saying: “*it is for the sake of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain”* Acts 28:20

Rebellious elements in creation had done all they could to halt Paul and the gospel (sea and snake) but had failed. Evil could not triumph. Paul might have been battered and bruised but the gospel message was alive, well, and ready to breach new ground.

Paul was allowed to remain in a rented apartment in Rome, guarded by a Roman soldier. He was allowed visitors. He spent his time teaching from morning until evening.

As usual, there is disagreement among the Jewish leaders about what he was saying. Some leaders were converted, others refused to believe. Paul rebuked the Roman Jews for their refusal to believe; he was not afraid to deliver God’s judgement upon those who heard the message and refused to believe.

He then revealed that God’s salvation had been sent to the Gentiles too. Paul welcomed all who came to him, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or free.

*“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 hinderance.”* Acts 28:30

Throughout his journeys, Paul’s defence was two-fold, one prong aimed at Jews, the other Gentiles: To Jews, he claimed that he was defending the traditional Messianic hopes (confirmed through the resurrection) that Jews had held for a long time. His faith in Jesus was the natural outcome of Jewish tradition, not a distortion of it. To Gentiles, he demonstrated that the legal system of Rome has nothing to fear from Christianity.

Paul’s arrest and imprisonment was not a setback but was rather an opportunity for Paul to preach the gospel to people and in places he otherwise would not have encountered, not because of Roman permission, more due to divine design. [[6]](#footnote-6)

He preached before Roman governors, the Jewish king; Jews and Gentiles; beginning in an unimportant backwater and ending up at the heart of the empire in one of the greatest cities in the world.[[7]](#footnote-7)

It was not the route he might have chosen himself, but he was constantly seeking the Spirit’s guidance on where his next step should be. Not even prison hindered him. The Spirit was in charge, directing events, empowering God’s people, performing miracles.

Paul when he was called Saul was initially focused on one course of action, travelling in the name of persecution. God halted his steps and diverted him with a new name of Paul on a new road, in the name of proclamation.

Paul had travelled from Jerusalem to Rome – from the beginnings of the gospel to its proclamation at the heart of the empire.

It is because Paul was imprisoned that we have his letters which make up the bulk of the New Testament teachings.

Paul had offered himself to Jesus and let Jesus guide his footsteps where he would. Whether or not Rome was the fulfilment of the command to go to “the ends of the earth,” what we see here was the fulfilment of the commission Jesus gave to his disciples: To be his witnesses and make disciples To baptise in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit Teaching them the words and commands of Jesus

Throughout the book of Act the author Luke has shown that the power of both the Jewish authorities and the Roman empire were no match for the power of God revealed in Jesus and proclaimed by Paul. Legal proceedings, imprisonment, persecution, shipwreck – nothing stopped the gospel message getting through.

“Caesar may not have paid much attention to Paul when he arrived in Rome, but some of his own household and personal guard did. Within three centuries, the quiet triumph of the gospel succeeded in winning over the empire, not by the sword but with love and truth. Luke noted the preaching of Christ, the welcoming hospitality of Jesus’s disciples, and the boldness that comes through the power of the Spirit.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

The book of Acts ends with Paul “teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.”

Luke does not reveal what happened to Paul, because Paul is not the focus of the book. The spread of the gospel and the inclusion of Gentiles – of all peoples – into the community of the people of God, is the focus of the book.

This is why the shipwreck is the ‘climax’ of the action, not Paul’s (unstated) final fate: God’s miraculous delivery of his apostle to the heart of the Roman empire, the message of salvation arriving in the city of Caesar.

Paul is not the hero. The real hero is Jesus, enthroned as the world’s true Lord and now openly proclaimed at the end in Rome. A risen, enthroned, proclaimed Lord who has been with his people all through their (literal) trials and tribulations, guiding them, empowering them, walking with them and leading them out into the world and its people, as they call all people to repentance and faith in the living, loving Lord who made them.

We too are not the hero. Jesus is. We are to follow what we are called to do and be and say, and the results are not ours but Gods. Ours is obedience.

Our role is listening to the leading of the Holy Spirit and of proclamation in every circumstance.

1. Acts: Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, Beverly Roberts Gaventa 338 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Eckhart J Schnabel, *Acts Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT* 1012 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Story of God Bible Commentary: Acts, Dean Pinter 569 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Acts (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT), Darrell L. Bock 728 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Message of Acts, John Stott 392 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Gaventa, 369 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Schnabel, 1080 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Pinter, 598 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)