PAUL’S TRIUMPHAL ENTERY INTO ROME

Acts 28:1-31

Key Verse:28:31 “He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance.”

Last week the media across the country broadcasted the removal of the statue of Christopher Columbus from the Tower Grove Park in St. Louis because of racial issues. Christopher Columbus, the explorer who discovered the land of America, is now evaluated both positively and negatively. But to our irony, the name ‘Christopher’ means ‘Christ-bearer’. Peter Marshall and David Manuel said in their book ‘*the Light and the Glory*’, that Christopher Columbus was the first person to bring the gospel to the land of America. Even though his reputation and contributions are divided because of racial issues, Columbus was the first one who brought the seed of the gospel to the land of America and who introduced the new land to Europe. His discovery of the new land and his arrival changed the history of the world.

1,400 years before the arrival of Columbus on the land of America, Apostle Paul arrived at Rome. Paul’s arrival at Rome also changed the history of the world. The western historians claim two mainstreams which have formulated western culture: Hellenism and Hebraism. They believe that Hebraism started with Paul’s arrival at Rome. Paul’s arrival at Rome is called Paul’s triumphal entry in Rome. From a human point of view Paul arrived at Rome as a prisoner who had appealed to Caesar. How could a Jewish prisoner’s arrival become a triumphal entry? Today we will study why it is called ‘Paul’s triumphal entry’ and how it changed the history of the world and what we have to do in view of Paul’s ministry.

First, Paul Ashore on Malta (28:1-10) After a few weeks of struggling against the storm, Paul and the 275 passengers on board finally arrived at the island of Malta. Malta is a small island in the Mediterranean Sea, 18 miles long and 8 miles wide, located 58 miles south of Italy. Today Malta is an independent country, but in Paul’s day it was a land of refuge like its name in Greek, ‘*Melita’*. The islanders showed Paul and his people unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed them all because it was raining and cold. (2) This picture reminds us of the Risen Jesus who visited his disciples at the Sea of Galilee, built a fire, and prepared a breakfast for them and said, “*Come and have breakfast*. (Jn 21:12) Paul and his companions must have been very encouraged by the kindness and generosity of the islanders. We believe that it is the Lord Jesus who not only saved their lives, but also prepared wonderful people for the sake of Paul.

Something unexpected happened. Look at verses 3-6. “***Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, “This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live.” But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead; but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happened to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.***” There was a Greek myth among the islanders that a murderer who escaped from a storm was killed by a snake. They thought that Paul was the murderer in the Greek myth. But Paul immediately proved that they were wrong. Nothing happened to Paul even though he had been bitten by a venomous snake. His body was not swollen at all. Rather the snake was burned by the fire. This event fulfilled Jesus’ promise in Mark 16:18, which says, “*they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well*.” Paul picked up the snake with his hand, but it did not hurt him at all. As Jesus promised, he will protect his chosen people from all harm and danger, and even from the coronavirus.

When the islanders saw nothing happened to Paul, they changed their minds and said he was a god. The islanders reminds us of the Lystraians who tried to worship Paul and Barnabas as Zeus and Hermes after they saw Paul heal a lame man during his first missionary journey (Ac 14:11-13) Paul’s healing ministry continued in the island. There was a chief official of the island named Publius, whose father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. (7-8) Paul went in to see him, and after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. When this happened, the rest of the sick on the island came to Paul and were cured. (9) This also reminds us of Jesus who welcomed the sick and healed them all with the mercy of God. (Mt 8:16, Mk 1:32,Lk 5:15) Because of Paul the island was full of joy of healing and the grace of God. As we studied last week, because of Paul all 275 people on board were saved. Paul became a source of blessing for all of them. Now in the island Paul became another blessing to the islanders. Paul became a blessing wherever he went. This was because God was with him. In the Old Testament God gave victory to King David wherever he went. (1 Chr 18:6,13) This was because David loved God and was a man after God’s own heart. Paul brought blessing to the island with the mercy of God and grace of Jesus Christ. Like Paul we Christians should be a blessing to whomever we meet and wherever we go. I pray for all of you to be a blessing to people of all nations. Let the mercy of God and grace of Jesus Christ be filled with all who we meet and in all the places where we visit. Amen!

Second, Paul’s arrival at Rome (11-31) While staying in the island of Malta, Paul was fully recovered spiritually and physically. After three months it was late February or early March, a time for sailing. Paul and his companion were ready to leave for Rome. All the supplies they needed for sailing were furnished by the generous islanders. (10) They took an Alexandrian ship and sailed for Rome via Syracuse, Rhegium, and Puteoli. Puteoli (Pozzuoli) is a beautiful port city near Naple, only 75 miles away from Rome. At the beautiful beach of Puteoli , Paul could have sung, “*O Sole Mio*” or “*Torna O Surriento*”. But Paul didn’t sing Canzone, but praised God who brought him safely thus far. “*All The Way My Savior Leads Me*.” At Puteoli Paul found some brothers and sisters who invited him to spend a week with them. (14) When the brothers and sisters in Rome heard that Paul and his companion were coming to Rome, they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Tavern to meet them. The Forum of Appius and the Three Tavern were satellite cities near Rome, where many travelers lodged before they got to Rome. When Paul saw the brothers and sisters who came from Rome, he thanked God and was greatly encouraged. In Jerusalem wherever he went, except the Jerusalem church, he was rejected. He was persecuted by the Jews in the city and tried because of them. He was rejected and despised by his own people as Jesus was rejected. Paul was rejected by his own people until he appealed to Caesar. But now in Rome Paul was welcomed. He was welcomed in Malta, in Puteoli, and in Rome. God comforted Paul through these welcoming brothers and sisters. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians, our God is the God of comfort. He comforts those who suffer for his name. God comforts those who mourn for righteousness. God comforts those who are rejected and persecuted because of the name of Jesus. Paul was comforted by the Lord and his people. Let us endure hardships and sufferings. This is because the day of God’s comfort will come when these hardships and sufferings are gone. Amen!

Finally, Paul arrived at Rome. Verse 16 says that when Paul got to Rome, he was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him. God provided Paul with not only some freedom, but also a body guard so that no one would harm him. At Rome Paul didn’t go out for sightseeing even though Rome was the capital city of the world in Paul’s day. Instead he invited the Jewish leaders to teach the good news of Jesus Christ. (17) He said to them. “***My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. 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.***” (17-20) Paul explained to them why he came to Rome. He claimed innocence from any charges against him. His main message was the hope of Israel, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ. He concluded that he was chained because of the hope of Israel, the Promised Messiah, who is Jesus Christ. The hope of Israel indicates Jesus Christ, the Promised Messiah. Israel had waited for thousands years for the Messiah who would liberate them from the power of their enemies. The Promised Messiah was not a political leader who would deliver them from the Roman Empire as Moses did from King Pharaoh, but a spiritual leader who would save them from their sins and death. There was a man named Simeon in Jerusalem, who was waiting for the consolation of Israel. When Joseph and Mary brought the baby Jesus to the temple, Simeon praised God who answered his prayer for the Messiah. He said, “*Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation…”* (Lk 2:25-32) Simeon was determined not to die until he saw the Lord’s Messiah. When he saw Jesus, he was released because his dream came true before his eyes. Jesus is the hope of Israel. He is not only the hope of Israel, but also the hope of the whole world. This is because God did not give any other name under heaven for our salvation, but the name Jesus Christ. Paul brought the hope of Israel to Rome, especially to his own people and to the gentiles. He is like an Olympic torch bearer who brought the torch from Jerusalem to Rome for world salvation. Paul planted the hope of Israel in Rome, the capital city of the world. This is the beginning of changing the history of the world. This is the great victory of God over the work of Satan. Satan tried very hard to stop Paul from coming to Rome. Satan mobilized all his agents, the Jewish leaders, to put Paul in jail in Jerusalem and in Caesarea. Satan tried to put Paul under the deep sea of the Mediterranean through the storm on the way. But nothing and no one could stop Paul. No trial, no storm, no snake could stop Paul from coming to Rome because he brought the hope of Israel. This is why we call his arrival at Rome the ‘triumphal entry into Rome.’

We call Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem ‘a triumphal entry’ even though he was coming to Jerusalem to be crucified. His suffering and death was not failure as some people say. His death on the cross was the great victory over Satan because Jesus overcame death and obeyed the will of God for world salvation. Jesus endured the cross and brought eternal life for those who believe in him. By rising from the dead, Jesus proved that he is the final and eternal victor over the power of Satan. As Jesus conquered death and brought eternal salvation to this world, so too has Paul endured sufferings and brought the hope of salvation to Rome. This is why we call his entry into Rome a triumphal entry. Amen!

The Jewish leaders in Rome who heard Paul’s message replied that they didn’t hear anything about Paul. They wanted to hear more about Christianity from Paul. At the next meeting, more people, a large number of Jews, came to hear from Paul. Paul witnessed to them from morning till evening explaining the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them of Jesus. (23) Paul didn’t lose any chance for the gospel. As fish meets water, from morning till evening he taught the kingdom of God and explained why Jesus is the Promised Messiah who fulfilled all the Old Scriptures.

The response for the gospel message always came out in two ways: positive and negative. Verse 24 says, “***Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe.***” Even though some rejected Paul, he was not dismayed. He accepted it as the fulfillment of God’s prophecy for the gentiles, Isaiah 6:9,10. Paul was already a victorious general, not a defeated soldier. He proclaimed in verse 28. “***Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen***.” Verse 29 is written in the foot note: “*After he said this; the Jews left, arguing rigorously among themselves*.” Some historians say that the history of the world has been developed with the cycle of struggling between thesis and anti-thesis. They meant that there always remain two conflicting forces: a positive force and negative force, which have developed human history. What they said is partially true. But history is his story, the story about Jesus Christ. History continues with the story of Jesus Christ because he is the only Messiah who came to save this world.

Paul’s ministry continued in Rome. Look at verses 30-31. “***For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance.***” It was around AD 61 when Paul arrived at Rome. Since then for two whole years, until AD 63 Paul taught the gospel in his own rented house to all who came to see him. No doubt he taught many Roman guards, officials, merchants, Italian pizza delivers, citizens, and even later before Caesar. Paul’s ministry might have been stopped when he was rearrested in AD 67, but the book of Acts didn’t stop with his death. Acts 29 continues with other gospel workers like you and me. You and I are writing the book of Acts 29, 30,31,…..until Jesus comes again. The Lord Jesus enabled Paul to teach of the Lord Jesus Christ freely without hindrance for two full years in Rome. In this way the Lord gave victory to Paul and kept the promise with him.

Luke, a historian, who was one of Paul’s companions, finished the book of Acts with a happy ending. Ungodly historians write negative views of future of human history. But godly historians write human history with a happy ending, the second coming of Jesus Christ. We are suffering from the COVID-19 pandemic and from difficulties coming from the virus. Still, our lives will be over with a happy ending. Our lives will not end tragically like the movie, *‘Parasite’*, but end triumphantly like the movie, ‘*Ben Hur*.’ Amen!