

“And So We Came to Rome” //

Acts 28:14–31 // SENT # 22

Introduction

Welcome to the Summit Church on the 94th straight rainy weekend in a row.

How many of you have been either close to a tornado or at the beach during a hurricane? I’ve really only been in the presence of a tornado one time.... I was staying over at a friends’ house with 2 other guys when it touched down about a ¼ mile from our house... It was **terrifying; everything they say is true**—sounds like a freight train.

I heard about a **couple guys at our church at the NRC** who were in Raleigh when the tornado came through in 2011... they said they were sitting outside on their porch **“enjoying the storm,”** when they saw the wall cloud form and they actually saw the funnel cloud begin to drop out of it... **Two guys sitting there** looking at this... and one guy said, “We’ve got to go get our camera!” and the other guy said, “We’ve got to get into the bathtub!” Thankfully cooler heads prevailed, and they got into the bathtub and I guess **pulled a mattress over** them or something, and spooned and prayed.

They said it was so loud... they could **hear trees snapping** and things being destroyed... after the storm was over and they **came out to see the damage**, and they saw that the tornado had come through their neighborhood, had destroyed several houses, had even touched down, apparently, in their backyard, snapping six trees but for some reason lifting right over top of their house. **They said the same thing I remember:** this terrifying sound of unbelievable power.

I share that because **that’s how Luke describes the descent** of the HS on the church... Acts 2 says that the Holy Spirit came on the church like a “mighty, rushing wind” ... (Remember I told you that ‘mighty,

rushing wind’ is not a great translation—the word in Greek implies a hurricane). This was **not some cool, refreshing breeze** that blew on their faces and filled them sentimental, religious vibes... This was a torrential wind that propelled them to the ends of the earth with the gospel.

This weekend, we’re going to see the Apostle Paul finally fulfill *his* dream of getting the gospel to Rome, some 2997.4 miles from where the Spirit first descended upon the church in that Upper Room... **and that’s going to bring us to the end** of the book of Acts... if you can call it an ending... as I’ll show you, it doesn’t really end.

And that’s because **you and I are still writing it**, in a way. This thing doesn’t stop with Paul because it’s never been about Paul and his ambitions but what the Spirit of God wants to do in the church. In you and in your world.

In these **last few chapters Luke basically recounts** for us Paul’s harrowing journey into Rome... and there are four things I believe the Holy Spirit wants us to see about our lives as we continue this journey that Paul and the Apostles started. **I have four of them:**

Open your Bibles to Acts 25. Write this 1st one down...

1. Live provocatively (25:22)

Let me **catch you up** on the story... **When Paul left the Ephesian elders** in Acts 20, and he got to Jerusalem to observe the Passover like he had planned, some of the **Jewish authorities there recognized** him and they told the Romans that Paul had come there to start a political revolt.

- **Which was, of course, a lie**, and when the Romans question him they realize it’s a lie, but they **can’t figure out what to do** with him, so they send him to the regional governor, a guy named Felix.

Felix left Paul in prison for 2 years... (Which, btw, *imagine how hard that would be*? It's one thing to be persecuted... but just to be forgotten about for two years? But don't be too discouraged for Paul. It was during that time that **Paul wrote several of the books** in your NT. So, **some of you are there now**... you feel like you've been forgotten... start journaling.)

Eventually Felix is succeeded as governor by a guy named **Festus**. **Festus is reviewing** his new responsibilities when he discovers Paul is in prison and wants to figure out why he's there, so he calls Paul to stand in front of him. The first thing he says when he comes out is, *"I appeal to Caesar."*

- (That was an **old legal precedent** where you could appeal right to Caesar... but you had to abide by what he said, no matter what, and remember, the Caesars were not usually paragons of fairness or even mental stability. The Caesar at this time is a guy named Nero, who was kind of a powder keg; walks around with emotional C-4 strapped to his chest.)
- But Paul's been in prison just sitting for two years, and he thinks, "Well, at least this way I can guarantee I'll get the gospel to Rome." *So he appeals to Caesar.*

Well, **before they ship Paul off to Caesar**, another governor in the region, Herod Agrippa, comes to visit Festus and says, "I hear you've got Paul?" Festus said "Yep." Agrippa says, "I've heard about this guy..."

[22] Then Agrippa said to Festus (BTW, got to be the worst name, right? Festus: Is it like festival or festering? Remember Uncle Fester?), *"I would like to hear the man myself."* "Then tomorrow," said (Festus for the rest of us) Festus, "you will hear him." (Acts 25:22 **ESV**)

So **Festus puts on this big fiesta** for all the local authorities—with the feats of strength, the airing of grievances—and the **centerpiece** is Paul defending himself.

Agrippa wants to know, *"Why do all the Jews hate this guy?"* Why he is in prison? Couldn't he be free?"

And here is my point: People constantly wanted to know what made Paul tick. People were always saying, "Paul, why are you in this condition? You don't have to be like this."

Paul manner of life provoked a question. Our lives should provoke a question. We're not in the same circumstances, I realize, but people should be able to look at us and say, *"I don't get why you live like you do. Why are you so generous? Why do you have such hope in the midst of pain? Why are you so patient and forgiving?"*

Peter said it this way: "In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you." 1 Peter 3:15

SEE how Peter is supposing that your life provokes that question? People are so intrigued by how you live, *"Why do you do what you do?"*

So how do you do that? Peter and Paul apply that a number of places

- The first one is simply in **how you do your work**: Paul says that our work should be done with such excellence and integrity even when no one is looking, that people say, "I can tell you work for a different boss than money."
- **How you handle disappointment or persecution or pain**
 - I talk about this a lot... but in pain and disappointment are some of the best places for you to put the gospel on display.
 - **Anybody can be happy when things are going well**; but **when you can have joy** when things are not going well, you show that you've got a foundation people in the world don't have.
 - Difference in happiness and joy
 - I told you the story of Pastor Raudel's dad
- **Your generosity of spirit** should provoke the question

- **Thomas Hawkins:** Stops to help a guy on side of the road who says his alternator is broken. Thomas offers to pay for it. Guy: I'll pay you back, need your mailing address. "No, it's not a loan." Why? Thomas gives reason: God has been generous—gift of Christ was free. I learned that from my church that if God wants us... ." Where do you go to church? Only two other people have stopped all day to help me... both were from the Summit Church."
- **What you do with your money should provoke the question:**
 - **Average person in churches like ours gives 2.4%** to mission of God. Average American gives 2%. Do you think that really provokes a question? **Most people assume that** Christians are just people who are moderately more moral, not people who live for an entirely different kingdom.
 - **Our generosity is supposed to beg the question...** Not, "Why are you a little more moral than me, but... there must be an investment fund you have I don't know about; an invisible kingdom I can't see!"
 - I heard something that helped me. **Christians who do what God tells them to do with their money will live 3 steps behind** their peers who make the same amount they do

Live provocatively—in a way that provokes the question.

- (BTW: On my blog this week, I am putting up a list of 26 ways we've come up with that you can *live provocatively* at work. Not, *dress provocatively*—that's a different kind of provocatively I would discourage... But *live provocatively*. We first introduced this list at the *Gospel at Work* conference in February: some of you should check these out. They'll give you some good ideas about how to apply this: jdgrear.com)

2. Seize opportunities (26:27–29)

At the end of Paul's message, Paul goes on this roll showing how all the Jewish prophets have prophesied about the coming of Jesus, and then Paul says: [27] King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?

(Agrippa, you see, was an ethnic Jew. He would have been about 8 years old when Jesus died. Do you believe?...) I know that you believe." [28] And Agrippa said to Paul, "Whoa, whoa, whoa... In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" "Paul. This is not about you trying to convert me." [29] And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains." (Acts 26:27–29)

- Paul's life is on the line, but he thinks, "Hey, I've been given an audience to proclaim Jesus to the governor!"
- Is that how you see your life? Is that how you see your profession?
 - Maybe God made you a **doctor** not just because you're good at medicine, or to give you a way to provide you're your family... but as a platform. Or maybe God made you a **teacher** for that reason. (I'm not talking here about violating ethnic norms... I'm thinking mainly about how you use your platform to share with your peers.
 - Maybe one of the reasons God made you an **athlete**...
 - **College and high school students:** You guys are on the single, greatest mission field in America! What if God's purpose is not only for you to get good grades and set yourself up for a job but also to bring others to Christ on your campus!
- Paul saw whatever situation, whether advantageous for him or not, as a platform from which to proclaim Jesus. *Are you doing that?*

Which leads me to #3...

3. Embrace sovereignty (27:21–26)

Herod and Festus put Paul on a boat to sail him to Caesar... but the boat gets swept up in a hurricane and blown out to sea where they basically get lost for a month. (*Seriously, this guy can't catch a break, can he?*)

[21] Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. *(Paul had warned them, through a word from the Holy Spirit, that this wasn’t a good idea. So this was Paul’s divine “I informed you thusly” moment.)*

[22] Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. [23] For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, [24] and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ [25] So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. [26] But we must run aground on some island.” Small details. I love this: “Hey guys, don’t worry about it. God has got to get me to Caesar. You guys are all with me, so you’re safe, too.”

- **Paul did not let the storm make him doubt God’s control.** In fact, he saw in the storm God arranging opportunities for him to share his hope in God:
 - Verse 37 tells us that there were **275 other people** on the boat. Some were **prisoners** like Paul; some soldiers; others were just travelers. Yet in this moment, they all have **one thing in common**: they are all terrified, thinking they are about to die.
- Paul is a *fellow traveler*, which gives him a uniquely compelling platform from which to share the gospel.
- ***As a Christian, God does not always shield you from the storm, he allows you to go through the same things everyone else goes through so you can show them what hope from within the storm looks like... what it’s like to experience the presence of God in the midst of the storm... because demonstrating the presence of God in the storm is powerful than calling to them from outside the storm.***
 - It’s on the ***cancer bed***, you can say, “My body is in pain, but my **spirit is filled with hope**, because *one day my God will wipe away every tear from my eye, and the pain I am*

experiencing now is not whether even to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in me.”

- It’s from the ***graveside of a child***, or in the midst of your ***third year not being able to be pregnant***, or in your **4th miscarriage**; that you can say, “*Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Who heals all your diseases, and forgives all your sins and redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy and satisfies you with good.*”
 - It’s when you’ve been ***treated wrongly***, or when you’ve been ***forgotten about***, or ***fired for doing the right thing***, that you can proclaim to others in the exact same situation, “*Though my father and mother have forgotten me, you, O Lord will take me in... you have lifted up my head above all my enemies.*”
 - It’s **easier to proclaim hope as a “fellow traveler”** than it is to call to people in a storm from your nice perch of safety.
- Or, maybe you are in a situation where you **messed up...** You’ve made mistakes. ***It’s when you’ve been broken by sin that you can proclaim the sweetness of God’s forgiveness and the healing power of his grace.***
 - *Do not buy into the lie that you need a perfect life to share the gospel.*
 - **The testimony of a fellow traveler is the most powerful testimony of all.**
 - The reason we show testimony videos here a lot is because quite often testimonies from within the storm are more powerful than what I say from the stage. We had one recently... It wasn’t the guy from the stage but friends who identified with me...
 - **Proclaim Jesus in the midst of doubt.**
 - (College students tend to listen to me more when I share my own doubts than when I sound like a Wikipedia answer man for Christianity.

- Be honest about your own questions. “But Pastor, I don’t ever doubt!” You are either lying or you just don’t think about stuff very deeply. **Greatest theologians** doubt—you’ll see that next week in our Psalms series)

Your testimony to Christ is more powerful if it comes from within the storm. In brokenness; in weakness; in pain. Contrary to the prosperity gospel, it is your place of weakness, not your place of strength, (that provides the best platform for your testimony, because you are not put on earth to demonstrate your awesomeness but God’s graciousness.

- So God **makes you a fellow traveler** who experiences hardship so that he can put on display his hope in you.
- He controls even the angry winds and waves for his purposes. So **embrace that God has sovereignly placed** you where you are to proclaim him.

And...

4. Live sent (28:30–31)

- Let’s go to the very end of the book. Here’s how Luke ends it: [30] **Paul lived there two whole years at his own expense** (under house arrest), and welcomed all who came to him, [31] **proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.** The End.
- Great, you say! But what happens when he stands before Caesar? *We don’t know.*
- (We do know that the letter Paul wrote to the Romans indicates he hoped to go on from Rome into Spain to be the first one ever to preach Christ there).
 - Well, does he make it? *Acts doesn’t tell us.* Ends in a cliff-hanger...
 - My wife and I watching these shows: Binge watch. 24.
 - Not like old school cliffhangers. Dukes of Hazzard.

- **This book is a cliffhanger. You aren’t told what happens to Paul and his dreams.** Why? Because it’s not about Paul or *his* dreams. It’s about the Spirit and the gospel.
 - In fact, **we know from history** that eventually was released, went to Spain, then was rearrested and beheaded by Nero.¹ Why not record all that?
 - **This is Luke’s way of saying to the Nero’s of the world,** we say, “You can kill and imprison Paul, but you can’t stop the gospel.”
 - **Paul is dead; the Spirit remains.**

And so, here we are, Summit Church, 2000 years later. We feel like we have put in Raleigh-Durham for a special time.

- **Like Rome, Raleigh-Durham** is an extremely strategic national city. It is one of the **fastest growing cities** in the US. *Time* magazine recently put it in its top 10 cities of **growing national influence.** It is called the **educational hub of America**, and some of the **smartest people** from around the world come here to start up businesses, or do research or practice medicine... **Young families** are flocking here.
- And we believe that we are supposed to **make the gospel famous** here. We want to **reach people no one else is reaching** by doing things here no one else is doing here.
 - So we constantly try new stuff—and not all of it works, and sometimes we have to back up—but we dust ourselves off and keep going... because it doesn’t start with us or end with us.
 - That torrential wind of the Spirit we see fill the church in Acts and scatter them to the ends of the earth wants to blow through RDU.

So here at the end, there are four ways I want to ask you to LIVE SENT:²

¹ He is released and goes to Spain (62–64); then re-arrested; then executed.

- **Live SENT in your inviting**
 - Take risks in your invitations. Invite that neighbor you never think would come. It will do two things: grow your faith; give God’s Spirit a chance to work. Not about you, but the Spirit’s power.
 - **Allie’s letter.**
 - What if each person reached 1 other this year?
 - **Live SENT in your volunteering**
 - This year, I want many of you to start giving back to those areas that have been giving to you. People in this church have been a blessing to you; be one to them.
 - Our **kids ministry**:
 - We don’t **babysit children** here; like Andy Stanley says, we try to place an anchor in their heart that goes so deep that they won’t drift far away from it, when they hit the insanity years, otherwise known as “middle school.”
 - Our kids’ ministry is the tip of the spear for the most accessible, vital mission field in America!
 - **Preston Finch**—high school student here. Dad died here a couple of years ago. He’s getting ready to go off to college, and he posted a Facebook post in which he talks about how a couple of men in our church have really invested in him after his dad died.
 - *“But as much as I love and appreciate those men, they’d be a failure at their job if they were the ones I remember and think about most. They pointed me to eternity. (They helped me realize) there’s a mission before me in this next stage of life. And I’m going to walk through that mission with the leadership of the King of kings... and my Prince of peace: Jesus Christ.”*
 - *That’s what the church is... **father to the fatherless.** You could be used that way.*
- *Some of you doing nothing...?*
 - **Live SENT in your generosity**
 - We don’t need your money; and God doesn’t need your money, but to build campuses, reach new areas, train up new leaders and missionaries and pastors takes *millions of dollars...* and I’m not worried, because the money is in the bank; it’s just temporarily being held in some of your banks right now.
 - Unashamedly, I ask: What has God entrusted to you? Are you living SENT in your generosity?
 - **Live SENT in your faith**
 - ***I want you to believe God with us for the future—not just of our church but the mission of God in the world.*** Andy Stanley told his congregation, something I’d love for you to pray with me, too:
 - Pray for that **person in your work or neighborhood** that would not darken the doors of the church. Pray for them every day.
 - Pray for **unused church assets** that are worth billions of dollars in this country. Pray these assets would be liquidated and the monies would be dropped in the laps of our church planters and other Christian ministries that are vibrant.
 - If you are a **businessman or banker**, I want you to pray that God would dump millions of dollar on the local church in the United States and the church would be great stewards of those monies.
 - Parents, pray **boldly for teenagers**, that God would raise up the next generation. That the next generation would **get it** and would not leave the church after high school and would call our nation back to Christ and finish the Great Commission around the world.
 - ***I want you to believe God for the people in your life***

² Adapted from a list of things Andy Stanley gave to his congregation

- **Acts doesn't end because it's still being written.** It ends in a cliffhanger because **you are writing** the next chapter.
- **Paul got the gospel to Rome: Will the gospel get to your community?** We don't know! Because you are writing that chapter.
- But the Spirit of God that was blowing in Paul's heart is available to you, and he can write that chapter through you.
- *So wake up, church! Wake up and pray up, sing up, read up and pay up... but don't **give up, let up, or shut up** until everybody in your community has heard.*
- **Believe God with us for UPG's in our day:** 6546
 - When Paul died, there was 12 upg's for every 1 church; now, there is 1 upg for every 680 churches
 - This is doable!

understand it all you will be whispering it to your children; earnestly pleading with your friends; yearning to see it spread to all nations.

- You are either trying desperately to spread the message or you've never understood it!
- **Missionary or mission field.**

And then offer yourself and your children as the answer to that prayer. Being sent is not just for professional Christians...

- **How many times have I showed you this?** The gospel goes into new areas first through regular people! When Paul arrives in Rome, vs. 14–15, he is greeted by “brothers” who got their through business; normal life transplants, etc, before he did, and they had already made converts and established a church! Paul comes to “confirm” their work and multiply it.
- **Some of you have jobs...**
- Go on a mission trip. (You signed up... now go)

Has this wind filled you?

Tornado:

- Jesus pulls you in and propels you back out.
- **Those people who encounter the gospel have to talk about it.** It cannot be that you have tasted of the gospel, felt its love, understood its implications, and are silent about it. If you are