

Acts 28:17-31: Do You See Your Life Through Your Eyes or God's?

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I. Introduction

Suffering is never easy, especially if it zaps the hope right out of you, especially if it seems to foreshadow your life's end. Where do we get perspective to see it through, to not only not give up, but to actually find joy and meaning in the middle of all that suffering? Is it possible to get new eyes in order to have a new perspective about our past, future, and especially our present troubles?

II. Acts 28:17-31: There are Only Two Ways to Look at Your Life, Through Your Eyes or God's

28:17-20, it's been about 2 ½ yrs since this whole ordeal began, since Paul was first arrested in Jerusalem (21:30). He's been in Rome only three days and he calls for the Jewish leaders (at this time, there were about 40,000 Jews living in Rome and at least 10 major synagogues). Why is Paul arguing his case before these Jewish leaders? Is he afraid of what they might do, thus, he ingratiates himself to them so they won't cause any problems for him, especially since he's awaiting trial before Caesar? From a human standpoint, it looks like Paul is trying to win friends and influence enemies. From this perspective, this is what Paul essentially says, "My fellow Jews, I'm one of you. I've done nothing wrong, not against our people or anything else. I'm a law-abiding Jew, yet I was turned over to the Romans. But when they examined me and were ready to release me, since I did nothing deserving of death, I was forced to appeal to Caesar when the Jewish leaders spoke against me. And don't think I have anything against my nation. I'm not here to file a complaint against my own people. The reason I called for you is this. I want you to hear it from my own lips: I'm actually a Roman prisoner because I believe in the central hope of Israel [Messiah]." There are only two ways to deal with life, with God or without Him. And it appears that Paul is trying to save his hide by identifying religiously with these Jewish leaders, i.e., their hope is in Messiah, so is Paul's. But what does Paul mean by 'hope'? It's not just Messiah in general; he's not trying to say "me too, I'm one of you." He's pointing to Israel's resurrected Messiah, Jesus Christ (Acts 23:6; 24:14-15; 26:4-8, cf. 13:16-39). If we see through human eyes, we think Paul's trying to save himself. But he's actually putting himself in harm's way again; he's trying to convert these Jewish leaders into Christians! How well did that go the last time he tried converting an unbelieving Jewish audience? Not so well (Acts 22:22).

28:21-31, in reply, the Jewish leaders essentially say, "We haven't heard anything bad about you, neither from any official word from the leaders of Israel nor from anyone who's come from Judea. But we do want to hear from you directly because we've heard some bad stuff about this Christian sect, people everywhere speak against it." The leaders then set aside a day when they can meet with Paul. And many came to his house where he was under Roman house-arrest. Paul then, from morning till evening!, solemnly testified of the Kingdom of God, persuading them about Jesus' Messiahship from both the Mosaic Law and the Prophets (basically the entire Old Testament). Some who heard believed, but others were not persuaded. And when they argued and failed to agree among themselves, they left, but not before Paul said one last word. He quoted Isaiah 6:9-10, a passage that describes how Israel will respond to Isaiah's ministry: they refused to repent and accept the salvation God offered them, just like many of the Jewish leaders are responding now to Paul. Therefore Paul informs them that God will take His salvation and offer it to the Gentiles who will accept it. Upon hearing this, they left and had a great dispute among themselves.

Did Paul just insult his guests? Will these Jewish leaders cause him problems? Paul's not concerned about what these Jewish leaders who just rejected the Lord's salvation will do. In fact, notice what Paul went on to do for two whole years: he continued preaching the Kingdom of God, teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence and no one stopped him!....and he was effective, Philippians 1:12-21. Notice, he continued to do what landed him in prison to begin with. Why? Because for Paul, "to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). He didn't look at his life through his own eyes, he saw everything that happened to him through the Lord's eyes. Paul's motto was, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me," Galatians 2:20.

Is it possible to have life and peace through terrible tribulation? The last eight chapters of Acts tell a horrendous tale concerning Paul. He was beaten half to death, arrested for no reason, though completely innocent he was tried several times, twice before Roman governors, jailed for two years, goes on a sea voyage that lasts several months which should've taken his life, crash-lands on an island and gets bitten by a deadly viper, and finally he makes it to Rome where he ends up in prison for another two years! How's that for tribulation? After all this, what's Paul's attitude? He's rejoicing! He's glad he went through it all (Philippians 1:12-18).

How can this be? If Paul's alone in this horrific journey, he's finished and he won't be happy at the end of it. He'll be bitter and angry. But if God is with him, if God is by his side, then his eyes see everything differently. We have two choices in this world: go it alone and experience death all day, every day. Or live life with God and experience life and peace, i.e., see the purpose for everything that happens, including the tragedies (Romans 8:6). And if you're having trouble seeing it, then all you have to do is ask Him and He'll give you the wisdom to see it all clearly, even your impending death (James 1:2-8, cf. Philippians 1:12-26).

Case in point: Irene struggles to breathe in the middle of Bible study and goes on to have a horrible night the next day, so bad it makes her think her body's shutting down. Will she give up hope? What will she think of God in such circumstances, of her life, of her pain, of her utter frustration? Will she see the Lord's hand in the midst of that suffering? The Lord promises to help you see His hand in it....all you need do is ask (James 1:5).



III. Conclusion

So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, 'Go to this people and say: "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them."' "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves. Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.