

## Acts 28:20

**It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.**

Next to the Bible, one of the greatest ever Christian books

- Is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*
- John Bunyan (1628-88) lived in the seventeenth century
- And was part of a Baptist congregation in Bedford
- Arrested for unlicensed preaching, Bunyan spent a total of 12 years in prison
- One-fifth of the 60 years of his life
- It was a postcard of John Bunyan that would later inspire Beirut hostage, Terry Waite
- In prison, Bunyan went through difficult times, but he did not give up
- In order to support his family he made laces for riding boots
- He wrote several books, letters to people who asked for his advice
- He made the best of things because he had hope in the kingdom of God

1500 hundred years before Bunyan, the apostle Paul was also imprisoned

- Shortly after his arrival in Jerusalem (21:15) Paul was seized at the temple (21:27)
- Fearing a riot, the Roman commander arrested Paul
- But when the commander learned that Paul was a Roman citizen
- He released him to appear before the Sanhedrin (22:30)
- When a violent dispute broke out, Paul was again taken into the Roman barracks
- Learning of a plot to kill Paul, the commander sent Paul under guard to Caesarea
- There he would appear before the governor, Felix
- Paul made his defence before the governor, who adjourned the case
- And apparently did little else for two years until he was succeeded by Festus
- When given the opportunity to appear before Festus, Paul appealed to Caesar
- Festus, not knowing quite what to write to explain why Paul was being sent to Rome
- Enlisted the help of King Agrippa, to specify the charges against Paul
- This gave Paul the opportunity to give his own public testimony
- Causing Festus to conclude that Paul's great learning was driving him insane

Luke, the writer of Acts, carefully documents, Paul's long sea journey

- That includes his being shipwrecked in Malta
- When Paul was bitten by a snake
- the superstitious islanders first concluded that he was a murderer or wicked man
- and then, because he did not die, that he was a god, or a favourite of the gods
- though they did not attempt to offer Paul any worship

The healing of Publius's father demonstrated the continuing power of Paul's ministry

- Malta fever was fairly common, caught from the milk of Maltese goats
- Paul continued to preach the good news of Jesus and to heal the sick
- But a long journey lay ahead of him

Ships, like inns, took their names from their figureheads and the Paul sailed for Italy

- On a ship with a painted carving at its prow of Castor and Pollux (Gemini)
- Patrons of navigation and favourite objects of sailors' devotion

At Rome, Paul was allowed outside of prison but was kept under guard

- Probably chained at the wrist to a Roman guard
- Paul's arrival at Rome is the climax of a long passage
- But more than that it is the climax of Luke's whole work
- For the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ now penetrates the very heart of the empire
- Paul used his captivity to spread the good news of the kingdom of God

Three days after arriving in Rome, Paul invited the Jewish leaders to meet him

- The immediate response appears to mean that they did not want to get involved
- But later a second, larger delegation came to see him
- Here we gain a summary of Paul's work

Luke tells us that Paul preached and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ (28:31)

- Preaching refers to a proclamation of the message that appeals primarily to the will
- One of the reasons that some people do not like preaching
- And only every use the word critically (e.g. 'Don't preach at me')
- Is because proper Christian preaching challenges the will
- And while a Christian or a seeker will appreciate being challenged
- A backslider or someone who is not seeking Christ will resent it
- Unlike preaching, teaching has an emphasis more on challenging the mind
- In Acts evangelism is sometimes described as 'teaching' (Acts 5:21, 25, 28)
- Teaching is important in order for people to understand what Christians are saying
- It could well be the case that for several hundred years
- People in Britain have needed evangelistic preachers, to challenge their wills
- But the background that the evangelistic teachers would have filled in was known
- But now it is the case that people are so uninformed about Christianity
- That we must recover the teaching dimension in evangelism

Earlier, Luke mentions that Paul helped the shipwrecked company at Malta

- To build a fire, by gathering a pile of brushwood
- which was when he was bitten by the snake
- it reminds us of the importance of witnessing for Christ in the ordinary

Ajith Fernando, a Christian from Sri Lanka, tells of an article in an Indian newspaper

- the journalist, who was not sympathetic to Christianity
- observed the numerous conversions among the tribal people of India and noted
- Christians went to places where no one else would go and lived among the people
- The theologian would call that being 'incarnational'
- It is a challenge for us in Britain in the new millennium
- So often 'successful churches' are made up of 'successful Christians'
- They inhabit prosperous neighbourhoods and have good jobs
- A critic has suggested that the trouble with today's Christians
- Is that we inhabit a parallel universe – meaning that our world
- And the world of ordinary people, especially the marginalised and suffering
- Hardly ever meet – this is not happened with Paul or with the Lord Jesus
- Christians might commend themselves for spending all their time with Christians
- Especially those Christians who think in exactly the same way that they do
- But Paul, like Jesus, was among the people, bearing witness to his saving grace

This does not mean that Paul was some kind of well-intentioned do-gooder

- The very fact that he was in Malta and then in Rome is summed up in his own words

It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.

(Acts 28:20)

But the critical question is ‘what is the hope of Israel’?

- What was the faith for which Paul was in chains?
- It is the faith that Peter first proclaimed at Pentecost
- And that formed the core (*kerygma*) of the apostolic preaching
- Preaching that can be summed up in three pairs of points

#### I JESUS IS THE PROMISED MESSIAH

Jesus is the promised Saviour; the death of Jesus was part of God’s plan

#### II JESUS IS THE RISEN LORD

God raised him for the dead as promised; the resurrection of Jesus was witnessed

#### III JESUS IS THE COMING KING

Jesus is glorified now and for ever; all must repent and believe in him

#### I JESUS IS THE PROMISED MESSIAH

In Acts 13 we have the record of Paul’s preaching in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch

- In this he gives a summary of Israel’s history
- How God chose their fathers (presumably a reference to Abraham and the patriarchs)
- and made them prosper in Egypt, leading them out in mighty power (the Exodus)
- after enduring their conduct in the wilderness for 40 years
- he gave them the land of Canaan
- he gave them judges until the time of Samuel the Prophet
- and when the people asked for a king, gave the Saul – who ruled for 40 years
- Saul was succeeded by King David, a man after God’s own heart

“From this man’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Saviour Jesus, as he promised.”

(Acts 13:23)

Through Abraham, God called a people, from whom the Christ would come

- Paul’s claim is that Jesus, the Messiah, the Christ, has come
- The Jews agreed that the Messiah would be the glory of his people Israel
- But they could not see how their Messiah would have been rejected
- Paul attempted to prove from scripture that Isaiah had foretold the Messiah’s rejection
- Because of Israel’s hardened attitude to the message of ‘God’s salvation’
- It was because of this that the gospel was now proclaimed to the Gentiles
- But, in any event, it was the promise of God that through Abraham’s seed
- All nations of the earth would be blessed
- It is because of his hope in Jesus as the Messiah that Paul is in chains

The second part of Paul's belief in Jesus as the promised Saviour or Messiah

- Was that the death of Jesus was part of God's plan
- The fact that Jesus was crucified would have caused the Jews to believe he was cursed
- For in the Deut. 21:23 it says: Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse

Paul picks up this very point in his letter to Galatians:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse  
for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."  
(Galatians 3:13)

How then could Paul believe that the man, Jesus, was the promised Messiah?

- Only because of his resurrection
- Consequently, belief in the resurrection summed up everything else for Paul

## II JESUS IS THE RISEN LORD

God raised him for the dead as promised; the resurrection of Jesus was witnessed

On several occasions Paul said that he was on trial because of the resurrection

- Before the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:6)
- 'I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead'
- Before Felix (Acts 24:21)
- 'It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today'
- This does not contradict his claim to be on trial because of the hope of Israel
- For Paul contends that the resurrection is the hope of Israel
- For he says as much before King Agrippa (Acts 26:6-8)

It is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that  
I am on trial today. This is the promise our twelve tribes are  
hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O  
King, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me.  
Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the  
dead?

Paul goes on to explain to King Agrippa that he himself was converted

- By a meeting with the risen Lord Jesus Christ
- The resurrection was also the hope of Israel
- The Jews might have been looking for a political Messiah
- A revolutionary who would free them from the yoke of Roman tyranny
- But that would be temporary and passing
- The Messiah that Paul preaches directs their thinking to much greater issues
- Not least the spiritual and eternal blessing that had been promised to their fathers
- This is the real hope of Israel
- A spiritual kingdom of holiness and love, set up in the hearts of his people
- To be the pledge of and preparation
- for the resurrection and the life of the world to come
- the Jews did their worst to Jesus, but God raised him from the dead
- and so by the resurrection Jesus was declared to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4)

The resurrection was witnessed:

- for many days he was seen by those who had travelled with him (Acts 13:31)
- Paul also is a witness of his resurrection
- The resurrection, Peter says, is one of the holy and sure blessings promised to David
- As the great commentator Matthew Henry notes:
- God raised up Jesus to be a prophet at his baptism
- A priest to make atonement at his death
- A King to rule over all at his ascension
- Raising him up from the dead
- was the confirmation and ratification of all these commissions
- and proved him raised of God to these offices
- God had promised to David that he would raise up the Messiah of his line
- A promise that was looked forward to in Christ
- Through whom is proclaimed the forgiveness of sins
- Through him everyone who believes is made right with God (Acts 13:39)

Paul was in chains because he preached Jesus is the promised Messiah

Paul was in chains because he preached Jesus is the risen Lord

Paul was in chains because he preached

### III JESUS THE COMING KING

Jesus is glorified now and for ever; all must repent and believe in him

In its most early verses, the book of Acts records the disciples' question:

“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”  
(Acts 1:6)

The Lord's answer is somewhat enigmatic:

“It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”  
(Acts 1:7-8)

As the book of Acts unfolds it charts the progress of the witness of Jesus

- In Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth
- Demonstrating that the kingdom of God is not so much a territory
- As the Jews might have thought, but God's kingly rule
- The preaching of the kingdom concerns not the restoration of an earthly Israel
- But a glorious spiritual realm where Jesus is King
- The blessed hope is, therefore:

The appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

(Titus 2:13)

Great God and Saviour – Jesus Christ: Jesus not simply Saviour but God

Paul sums up his Christian ambition in this way:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

(Philippians 3:10-11)

If knowing Christ is the great desire of the Christian

- Paul also reminds us that this must be a spiritual relationship
- Not one based on external appearances or superficial judgments
- For we no longer think of Jesus as a mere man
- But as one, 'crowned with glory and honour' (Hebrews 2:7)
- For Jesus, though man is also God
- though born of woman is God from everlasting
- Jesus is glorified now and forever

But the good news of Jesus, PROMISED MESSIAH AND RISEN LORD

- Requires also a response
- In a territorial kingdom anyone in that territory is expected to honour the king
- But the kingdom of Jesus is not a territory but a company of people
- Who are committed to his kingship
- That is why the essence of being part of the kingdom of God
- Is to repent and believe

Remembering that Jesus has come to proclaim the kingdom

- Is an even greater message than what he can do for the individual
- The individual Christian is part of something much bigger
- If we feel that we are living in circumstances of decline or defeat
- We must remember that we are part of the great and coming kingdom
- Even though Luke's two volume work ends with Paul in chains
- The gospel has moved forward

There is a sense in which Acts appears to be unfinished

- But in breaking off as he does, Luke suggests that the story will continue
- Until the final consummation of the kingdom in Christ
- When this same Jesus who ascended comes back

For Paul, the tradition runs that he was released from this imprisonment

- And had more evangelistic friends, before further imprisonment and martyrdom
- But now the gospel is being taken to both Jew and Gentile
- And the Holy Spirit is writing the sequel to Acts through the service of his people

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