

NOT YOUR PLAN?

DAVE WEBB

Anybody remember COVID? That wasn't our plan!

A couple of days after Governor Newsom closed California in March of 2020, our children had the difficult job of telling a couple hundred people not to come to their wedding.

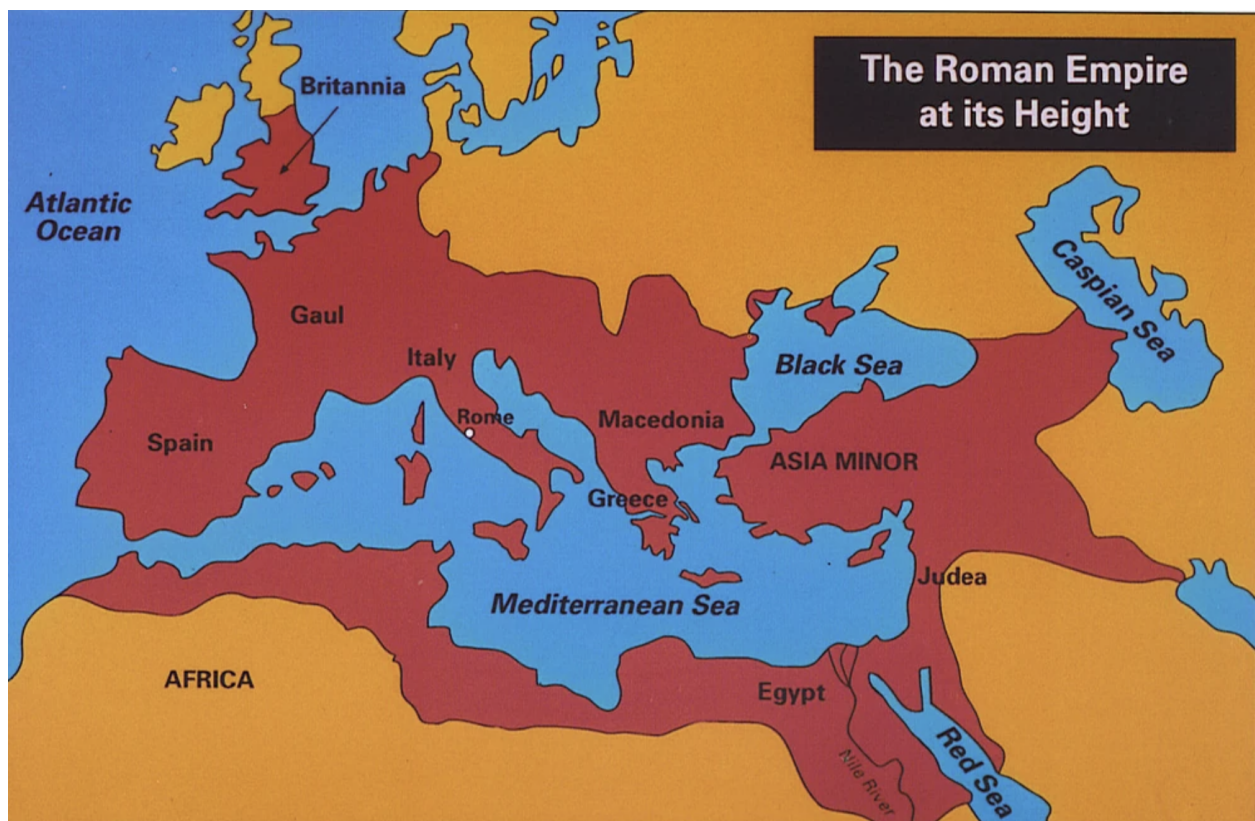
I remember calling my sister-in-law and asking her to tell my niece who was on her second flight out of Las Vegas that she should return home. I didn't want to lose anyone.

Now our children had to decide what their wedding was going to look like?

Men had a plan. God had a different plan. God's intent was to work through men with or without their acknowledgement or willingness or understanding. And He does it to His own glory in the process. [This is] how the Gospel moves throughout the world.

STEPHEN ARMSTRONG

See God's work through shipwrecks and confinements



CONTEXT

- Rome, the capital of the greatest empire the world has ever seen
- Roman Empire: 3,000 miles east to west, 2,000 miles north to south
- Rome, 4.5M, half were slaves
- Paul has traveled 2,250 miles from Caesarea
- Paul is allowed to dwell in his own house, pay his own way, with soldiers chained to him constantly-- not put in the common prison.

Paul Preaches at Rome Under Guard

¹⁷ Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul 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. ¹⁸ They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ 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."

Paul's mission strategy in Rome

- Trust God to guide and provide
- The Lord is fulfilling his promise to Paul-- he is testifying in Rome.
- Communicate to the Jewish leaders that he is not there to speak against the nation of Israel. He is there for political reasons.
- Paul is self-aware that he is there to testify of the hope of Israel.

¹¹ The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." Acts 23:11 (NIV)

- Rome provides Paul house with a guard
 - Not only does this provide arrest security, but the twenty-four-hour guards intimidate any Jews from Asia, Macedonia, or Jerusalem that might attempt to assassinate him.
 - Plus, throughout each day, Paul would get to have conversations with six guards in four-hour shifts. Imagine the dinner conversations these guards had with their families when coming home from work-- "Babe, today, I met the most fascinating prisoner at work."
- Touches base with the local Jewish leaders first-- "he called together the local Jewish leaders."
- Summarizes the last two years-- his arrest, two years' statutes of limitations in Caesarea, appeal to Caesar, and his defense of reason for his arrest-- "the hope of Israel."

²¹ They replied, "We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. ²² But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect."

The Jewish leaders of Rome have only heard that the Way is a "sect" of Judaism.

- Paul's accusers have yet to communicate with the Jewish leaders of Rome
- God is giving Paul an opportunity to share the Gospel with the Jewish leaders without any bias, except for the criticism Christianity is receiving from "people everywhere."

²³ They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the **kingdom of God**, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about **Jesus**. ²⁴ **Some were convinced** by what he said, but **others would not believe**.

Paul's mission strategy in Rome

- Rome provides Paul's house with a guard and "even larger numbers" of Jewish leaders who come to hear Paul.
- Paul "witnessed (martureo) to them" of the promised "the kingdom of God" (God's rule without borders) and the King "about Jesus" from the Law and the Prophets.
 - The Kingdom of God describes God's rule through Jesus, the Son of Man (Daniel 2:44-45; 7:13-14, 26-27).
 - The citizens of the Kingdom of God are described in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7; Luke 7).
 - For the Jewish leaders, listening to the Kingdom of God must have been appealing as it is prophesied to overcome all the kingdoms of the world, ultimately renewing a relationship with the Jews in Israel. Paul may have even referenced the establishment of Jerusalem as the center of worship. This would have been compelling!

⁴⁴ "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. Daniel 2:44 (NIV)

[22:30] 483 years from Artaxerxes restoration of Jerusalem to the Triumphant Entry

Paul's witness attempted to "persuade them about Jesus" was

- Based on the Law of Moses and the Prophets

⁴⁴ He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Luke 24:44–47 (NIV)

- The Law and the Prophets underscore the theme-- someone is coming (Luke 24:44-47).
 - In C.H. Dodd's, *According to the Scriptures*, he identifies the following Old Testament Scriptures used by Jesus and the Apostles to develop NT Theology (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; Deuteronomy. 18:15, 19; 2 Samuel 7:13-14; Psalms 2; 8; 16; 22; 31; 34; 41; 42; 43; 69; 80; 88; 110; 118; 132; Isaiah. 6:1-9:7; 11:1-10; 28:16; 29:9-14; 40:1-11; 42:1-46:5; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12; 55:3; 58:6-10; 61; Jeremiah 7:1-15; 31:10-34; Hosea 2-3; 5:8-6:3; 13; Joel 2-3; Amos 9:11-12; Habakkuk 1-2; Zechariah 9-14; Daniel 7; 12; Malachi 3:1-6).
 - Once Paul started talking about Jesus' required suffering (Acts 26:23), his witness was polarizing.
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- The Jewish culture valued power. The idea that the Messiah had to suffer on a Roman cross is upside down from their messianic-hero model.
 - Luke says, the Jewish leaders were split
 - If you want to know the truth about someone, reference their close friends-- read Matthew or John.
 - People choose not to believe-- often unwilling to examine the evidence.
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- Paul closed the evening lecture with this quote from Isaiah. This is the famous missionary “Here, am I. Send me” response from Isaiah. The immediate context of Isaiah's commissioning is that he will be sent to an unbelieving audience.

²⁵ They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet:

2 Tim. 3:16

²⁶ “Go to this people and say,
“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.”

²⁷ For this people's heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,

understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.'

This is not us! But it could be.

- Presently, we are living in what is called "the time of the Gentiles." God is opening the hearts of Gentiles to believe in the Gospel and to be healed.
- The immediate context of healing is Isaiah's who said, "Woe to me!" I cried, "I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." (Isaiah 6:5-7).
- We are believing the Gospel and experiencing healing! We are hearing and understanding, seeing and perceiving, seeing with our eyes, hearing with our ears, and understanding with our hearts, turning and receiving healing.
- Turn is synonymous with "Repent!"

²⁸ "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" ^[29]

³⁰ For **two whole years** Paul stayed there in his own rented house and **welcomed all** who came to see him. ³¹ He **proclaimed the kingdom of God** and **taught about the Lord Jesus Christ**—with all boldness and without hindrance! Acts 28:17–31 (NIV)

[Chuck and Jan Smith traveling among tribal Christians in Papua New Guinea: Chieftain said, "We used to use these to kill men. Now that I have this (holding up his translation of the Bible), I don't need these anymore. I want to give them to you."]

Notes:

1. God wanted his message to the Maltese
2. To Paul, it looked like a great tragedy
3. God used that disaster to bring his hope to his people
4. While in Rome, Paul witnessed to those who came to him, and wrote some of his epistle to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, or Philemon. Paul wrote all of these during this two year time.
5. Book of Acts closes in 63. Paul wrote 2 Timothy in 66. The trail of Trophimus from Ephesus to Jerusalem and his having been mentioned in 2 Timothy 4 implies that Paul again visited Ephesus and Miletus before returning to Rome.
6. Why did Luke stop his record here? In Acts 1, the words of Christ have been fulfilled. The gospel which began in Jerusalem has spread to the uttermost parts of the earth that first century of the church's history.

7. John will write about thirty years later which will close the canon of Scripture.

God mission strategy

- The Gospel will go to the non-Jews (the Gentiles).
- Similar to his two-year ministry in Ephesus, Paul rents his own house and "welcomes all."
- His statute of limitations runs out, and he is released about AD 63.
- Paul had a fifth missionary and, according to second and third century church fathers like Eusebius, visited more churches, and eventually returned to Rome. Upon his second time in Rome, he was arrested, stood before Emperor Nero, and was beheaded in AD 68. Luke likely wrote Acts between AD 63 and 68.
- Some believe Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke while in Caesarea and this account while he was with Paul in Rome.
- The message is the same-- The Kingdom of God and Jesus. And he does this with "all boldness and without hindrance!"

WHY THIS MATTERS

- While we may not be chained to a Roman centurion, but sometimes we feel...
 - Stuck at work-- unable to move forward.
 - Trapped in a less-than-ideal home or neighborhood.
 - Weary of stagnant and unfulfilling relationships.
- God has a plan, and it's not what I had in mind because I'm shipwrecked and confined.

2 WAYS TO LEVERAGE A SHIPWRECK OR CONFINEMENT

APPLICATION:

See God's work through...

1. Shipwrecks and confinements

Paul Preaches at Rome Under Guard

¹⁷ Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul 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.

²⁰ 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."

We share our stories all the time!

APPLICATION: Share your Jesus story regularly

*Your story expands the kingdom of God.

See God's work through shipwrecks and confinements and...

2. Join Him

³⁰ For **two whole years** Paul stayed there in his own rented house and **welcomed all** who came to see him.

³¹ He **proclaimed the kingdom of God** and **taught about the Lord Jesus Christ**—with all boldness and without hindrance! Acts 28:30–31 (NIV)

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU'RE CONFINED! PAUL WROTE:

- Ephesians
- Colossians
- Philemon

So God provides Paul "his own rented house" in Rome. And what does he do? He opens his house and welcomes all. Imagine the opportunity to sit down with Paul with a double-shot espresso and hear him teach. Imagine sitting down for dinner with Paul around a table of Italian pasta and listening to him tell the story of his encounter with Jesus in Arabia for three years

God provided Paul a home and he opened his home to all. We forget that the Gospel actually reached Europeans in open homes-- Cornelius' home, Lydia's home, the Philippian Jailer's home, Titius Justus, and Publius' house on Malta who showed Paul hospitality for three days!

APPLICATION: Open your home (Host a bar-be-que this summer)

Wins!

Your kids get to see you adulting-- you become a little cooler!

You get free house cleaning-- because you have to clean your house

You become a better cook or dishwasher!

You build trust with others! They see who you really are!

Final Thought-- Paul got out of confinement. He went on a 5th missionary journey to Miletus and Ephesus again.

WHY SHARE YOUR JESUS STORY REGULARLY AND SHOW HOSPITALITY?

["Jesus Christ fulfilled those prophecies of the king who will come and establish the kingdom of God and bring God's kingdom to the earth. And we will see the earth restored as God intended it to be. We will see the deserts becoming a lush garden, roses breaking out in the desert streams in dry places. We'll see the abolishment of war and crime. We will see the end of suffering and pain. We'll see the end of physical handicaps as the lame will leap for joy and the dumb will be singing praises unto God. I believe that that king is coming again and I believe that it is the very same Jesus who was prophesied in the Scriptures, the stone that was rejected has become the chief cornerstone. And when he comes again he will indeed be the chief cornerstone and Jews and Christians will be united together in worship of the Messiah. There are not two messiahs coming. There is one Messiah coming. He is coming to reign over the earth. We shall live and reign with him in his kingdom." PASTOR CHUCK SMITH SR, CALVARY CHAPEL COSTA MESA]

CONTENTMENT WITH GOD'S PLAN:

Psalm 16:5-6 (NIV)

⁵ Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup;
you make my lot secure.

⁶ The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance.

Wedding conclusion...

So our children were going to get married! Immediate families, the photographer (three came!), the groom, the bride, and two dear friends in our neighborhood helped serve. I think there were just 37 of us. We exceeded our numbers by a few. But honestly, three photographers came. Totally unnecessary!

It was an unforgettable wedding. We got so connected with one another's families. We had enough beverages for 200. So we were good through 2022. There were a few moments during the ceremony and after that were unforgettable.

See God's work through shipwrecks and confinements