

Text: Acts 24.27  
St Stephen's

June 7/8, 2008  
Sat/Sun

## God's Waiting Room

Today I want to take a look at **Paul, and how he spent years in jail.** You remember that last week in Acts 24 we saw Paul on trial before the Roman Governor Felix. At the conclusion of the trial, Felix adjourned the hearing, then Luke writes:

*When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.*

Acts 24:27 (ESV)

Would you say with me, '**two years**'? At the height of his ministry was **in jail for two years.** Then he was released and taken to Rome, where he spent **another two years** in jail. That is **four years** in jail.

Doesn't it seem to you **a waste of Paul's time**? This is arguably the greatest of the Apostles, the guy who is doing the best ground-breaking mission work of anyone on the planet, God's special ambassador of the best news in the world – and he rots in Roman jails for four years!

I call this kind of place **God's Waiting Room.** The waiting room is **the place where you can do nothing, and you think God is doing nothing.** It is the place where your **hands are tied,** and **he doesn't care** - or so you think. It is a place where you feel like you are **all alone.** Like **God has forgotten** you. You can be looking for a job and find yourself in God's Waiting Room. An accident can put you there. You can get sick and find yourself there. You can be looking for that special someone in your life – and you are in God's Waiting Room!

But God's waiting room is one of his very special places, and often an important part of his plans for our lives. Let's Look at what happened to Paul during those years in jail.

### 1. In His Waiting Room, We Find New Strength

**In Paul's case,** he had been arrested in Jerusalem, brought to Caesarea for **trial before Felix,** who took a step to protect Paul. He **adjourned**

the trial, and placed Paul under **house arrest**, giving him access to his friends and some freedom.

But that was far from his hopes and plans. Before he got to Jerusalem, he wrote to the Christians in Rome about **his plans** after Jerusalem *since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing **as I go to Spain**, and to be helped on my journey there by you...*

Romans 15:23-24 (ESV)

**His goal** was to be a missionary in **Spain**. But rather than send Paul to Spain, **God sent him to prison**. To his waiting room. You've been there. You are hot to get on with your plans, and then comes the layoff, or the pregnancy or some other obstacle, and **your hands are tied**.

It is the place of **weakness**, the place where I come to the **end of me – and at the same time** that place is where we **discover a new kind of strength**. Paul had written to the Corinthians about **an earlier visit** to God's waiting room where he suffered from a **physical ailment**. He prayed repeatedly for God to take it from him, but God would not. Instead, in the end, God spoke to him:

*he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)

Paul had learned that the place of his weakness became the place of God's own power.

Again and again God brings us to these places, I think just so we can **learn that everything does NOT depend on us...** that when our hands are tied, His are not. That when we come to the end of our own resources, we have hardly begun to tap his.

Or, more honestly, we are **now ready to learn how to tap his**. Listen to how Isaiah wrote about God's waiting Room:

*"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."* Isa. 50:31

Eagles mount up to their heights by **riding the tremendous updrafts – not by flapping and flapping and flapping**. They ride the currents. I like that picture! God wants us to ride the currents of his Spirit. **I need that kind of strength in my life.** I've spent enough years flapping and flapping!

## **2. In His Waiting Room, God Shapes our Character**

God's plans for Paul in the years ahead were far different and more difficult than Paul's own plans. **To follow God he would have to find a character beyond his own.** The waiting room is often the place where **character is shaped**, where **God prepares you** for what may lie ahead.

Paul knew that such character is often produced by waiting...

*...we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*

Romans 5:3-4

Would you **say, 'perseverance'** with me? That means staying with your faith in difficult times. It means staying strong, being solid, no matter... Waiting does that. **Waiting and perseverance go together.** And together, they shape your character.

If you're like me, **I'd like to develop character without having to wait.** I'd like God to have a different process. That's not how we're made. You can't make **steel** without tempering it. **Diamonds** are made over thousands of years of pressure and heat. It takes time to make the finest things. You can't develop character without going through times of waiting.

## **3. In His Waiting Room, God Refocuses our Prayers**

Have you found that when you are waiting and praying for something that you really want, **God changes your prayers** over the time of your waiting? As you prayer changes, your direction changes, your heart

changes...

I bet that when Paul was first arrested, **he prayed for protection and deliverance**. I know that was how his friends prayed. "Lord, get me out of here and on to Rome and Spain."

Sometimes God takes answers that prayer. But I have found that some other times, **he delays** his answer and instead, **God brings us a question**. In the middle of our frustration and impatience – and our anger – he asks us an important question.

**"Am I enough for you?"**

And that is an important question. Again and again in the Bible we find people facing directly into that question. "Am I enough for you"

It is a question that calls for **an honest answer**. **Job** faced that question when he was stripped of everything dear to him and spent months in the Waiting Room. Barren **Hannah** faced that question while she prayed for decades for a son while she was in God's Waiting Room. **Israel** faced that question for 40 years while they were in the desert.

"Am I enough for you?" What is more important to you, the promises – or the Promiser? The gifts, or the Giver? The answers to your prayers, or the One you pray to? Is He enough for you?

**Isaiah** wrote about *"They that wait upon the Lord..."* In the **English** language, the word **"wait" means stop**, dead in the water, red light, "I'm not going anywhere!" But in the **Hebrew** language the word **"wait" means trust** -- put your eyes on God and recognize during this time of waiting that He and He alone is the one I need.

That would have come to Paul in his Waiting Room. And he would have bowed his head and answered, **'You are enough**. Having you, I have all things!' The only place we learn that is in God's Waiting Room

#### **4. In God's Waiting Room, He Redirects our Steps**

If God wants to change the direction of our lives, **He's got to get us to stop**. Once God has stopped us, He can turn us in the direction He wants us to go.

**Paul's plans** were for a **new mission journey to Spain**. But God had other plans for these next four years. Paul would spend them in prison, first in Caesarea and then in Rome. God stopped him.

Over the last couple of years I have taken to getting away for **silent retreats**, places where I turn off my cell phone, let my responsibilities go, and do nothing. **Do nothing in the presence of God**. That is what Sabbath is. When I take Sabbath time, I settle before God, and things clear up.

**Illustration:** jar of pond water. When you first scoop it up, it is all cloudy. Let it sit, and it settles and clears up. Then you can see things that you could not see before. That happens in God's waiting room.

In God's waiting room, Paul stopped. He settled. And he cleared up. Then **Paul began to write**. He wrote what we call **the prison epistles**, the letters to Philemon, the Philippians, the Colossians, and the Ephesians. **From his prison cell he wrote** to the Philippians,

*it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.*

Philippians 1:13-14 (ESV)

**The water had settled.** He saw clearly, spoke boldly, and wrote powerfully. God had redirected...

Do you find you are in God's waiting Room this day? That place where you hands are tied? The key to the waiting room season is to look in that very place to the Lord Jesus. **Look** to him and **lean** upon him and **reach out** to him. You will find him there with you, and when you do, you will also find that this is the place where God does some of his deepest work. Renewed Strength – updrafts of the Spirit. Character that is tempered and true. Prayer that is focused on Him, the Lord who is more than enough. And guidance – direction for the days ahead. It is the place where God does some of his very best work.