

Chapter 30 Part I



Paul's Final Days

Introduction: Did you know that the lives of the Apostle Paul and the Emperor Nero overlapped for a short time in the city of Rome? In the seventh decade these two famous men lived in the same city. While Nero's name was making headlines, Paul's wasn't. Nero would have been invited to state dinners hosted by the President. Nero was hero.

Paul was zero. Paul was just an average, old man. Paul kept talking about Jesus as if he were God. So, Paul got locked up in prison in Rome. If you asked anyone in Rome in the seventh decade, "Who will make the greatest impact on the world, Nero or Paul?" everyone would pick Nero. Nero was married to a beautiful woman; what Nero wanted, Nero got. However, at age 25, Nero deified himself by erecting a 120 foot tall statue of himself. People looked up to Nero, but looked down on Paul. Paul was common, described as bald-headed, small man with a body covered with scars.

- I. The New Testament records the dynamic life and deep struggles of Paul.
 - A. Paul tells of his tumultuous life. *2 Corinthians 11:23-29*
 - B. Paul walked in the major cities of the known Roman world.
 - C. Paul worked as a tent-maker in the mornings and spoke about Jesus Christ and the Gospel from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. each day except the Sabbath.
 - D. Paul wrote books as he traveled and as he sat in prison, and we treasure his words to this day.
1. Paul was both a prophet and a pastor, who never got over that the living Jesus met him, changed him and commissioned him as an apostle.
2. Paul was a spokesman for God's grace; he was a messenger of grace; his favorite word was "grace."
3. Everywhere he went Paul caused an uproar. *Acts 21:30-31*
- II. Paul reveals the secret of his ability, in the face of opposition, to endure to the end.
 - A. Being rejected and often left for dead, how did Paul face the severe challenges in his life?

Application: We need to know the answer for some of us are rejected by our families for following Jesus. Some think we are crazy for believing in Jesus. Some feel the isolation that comes from being devoted to Jesus. We all have storms of some kind—relational, financial, personal.

Possible discussion questions:

- How was Paul able to endure the pain and trials that he suffered for his beliefs?
 - What are you willing to endure for *your* beliefs?
- What can you learn from Paul's life about how to face difficult circumstances?
- Why was Paul willing to walk into the face of danger?
- What life lessons from Paul's journeys can we apply to our lives to enrich our Christian walk?

Chapter 30 Part II



Paul's Final Days

B. While in the Roman prison Paul wrote to Timothy revealing the secret of his endurance.

Read *2 Timothy 1:8-12*

1. Paul anchored his life to a hope out of this world.
2. Paul entrusted his life into the hands of God.

Application: We can identify with Paul because many times we feel like nothing in life is going right.

C. Paul ended his life very well; Nero did not. *2 Timothy 4:6-8*

1. Paul's new life began on the Damascus road and ended on a chopping block in a prison cell in Rome.
2. Nero, at the age of 29, was lonely and paranoid; his second wife killed his first wife and Nero kicked his pregnant second wife and she died; and four years after Paul's death, Nero committed suicide. Nero was no hero. Paul still impacts us to this day.

Possible discussion questions:

- Explain the character traits you see in Paul that demonstrate our mission as Christians.
- How does your character compare to Paul's?
- What practical steps can you take to cultivate character qualities that resemble his?
- What life lessons can we apply to our lives to become stronger disciples of Christ?
- How would you sum up Paul's message?

Application: There are no Saint Nero Cathedrals. People do not name their sons *Nero*. Lots of people are named Paul and Pauline. Who are the real difference-makers in the world? Not the spot-light seeking, attention-craving celebrities. It is the ordinary *Pauls* and *Paulines*, the church, who are making a difference for all eternity.

Only the church has been given the story of grace.

Are you fighting the good fight?

Are you finishing the course?

Are you running the race?

Does God have you?

The Book of Acts still continues and it is the story of our local church.