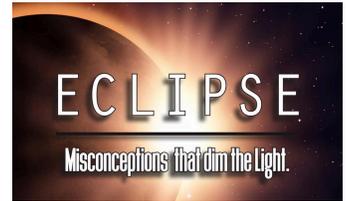


## TALK IT OVER GUIDE

**BREVARD COMMUNITY CHURCH**  
**ECLIPSE - MISCONCEPTIONS THAT DIM THE LIGHT**  
**PAUL'S TESTIMONY IN ROME**  
**ACTS 28:16-32; ISAIAH 6:8-13**  
**08/20/2017**



### MAIN POINT

Encountering Jesus completely changes our hearts and aligns our passions to His.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**How many different meanings of the word “heart” can you think of? Why does it have such a wide range of meaning and uses?**

**What does it mean when we say someone has a “soft heart” or a “calloused heart?” Which of these are more desirable? Why?**

“Heart” can have different meanings in our culture. For some, it is an expression of love and emotion. Others think medically about the organ, and some see it as the source of their passions. We can have full hearts and broken hearts. When Paul talked about the church in Rome, it is evident that his heart for people had been turned upside down, not just for the Jews, but for the Gentiles as well.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 28:16-32.**

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**What is unique about the circumstances of Paul’s detention in Rome?**

**What specific ways did Paul create an opportunity to share the gospel? To whom did Paul have the opportunity to present the gospel? What did he want this audience to clearly understand?**

Paul had no charge to lodge against his people. On the contrary, “my own people” (v. 19) stresses Paul’s identity with the Jews. He did not want to alienate the Jews in Rome or their leaders. At no point in his ministry did he distance himself from his people.

**What do you think Paul was referring to when he mentioned “the hope of Israel” (v. 20)?**

**How does Paul show his heart for the church in Rome? What are all the things he did for the church? Why did he do them?**

**What are some things you can do for the good of our group? How has God given you a heart for the people of this church and our community?**

Paul had asked to meet with Rome's Jewish leaders to explain how he had come to be awaiting trial before Caesar. Paul declared he was wearing chains because of the hope of Israel. He considered himself a loyal Jew whose deep conviction was that Jesus Christ was Lord. Paul showed his heart for the church in Rome by staying for two years on his own dime. He welcomed visitors, preached the kingdom, and taught about Christ. Paul invested his heart into the people of Rome just as he had invested his heart into the ministry to the Gentiles throughout his journeys. Paul was showing how his heart had been changed to minister to those called to God no matter their ethnicity. This echoes the message in Isaiah 6, that was quoted in Acts 28.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ISAIAH 6:8-13.**

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**What was Isaiah's response to God's overwhelming grace?**

**What trials awaited Isaiah in his new mission?**

**How are we, at times, tested by God in a similar way? What are the reasons for this testing?**

**What various responses have you encountered when you've shared the love of Jesus with someone? What responses can we expect as His disciples?**

Isaiah didn't hesitate when he volunteered for the Lord's service. He immediately said, "Here I am. Send me!" When God calls us to His service, our response should also be an immediate "Send me." Isaiah's commitment to deliver that message would be put to the test by the people's ever-hardening hearts and by the duration and extent of God's judgment against them. Isaiah would prophesy to a nation where the majority of people would fail to believe and repent. The result of their unbelief would be a devastating judgment resulting in exile. God also promised a future, for a believing remnant would survive and return to the land.

**What are some gifts God has given you? In what ways are you using them to serve Him?**

**Describe an area of service that has been particularly demanding for you. How did God help you persevere?**

Isaiah responded to God's holiness by confessing personal sinfulness and by determining to serve the Lord. When Isaiah volunteered to serve, God gave him a specific task and called him to be faithful over the long haul. Isaiah's success rested on faithfulness rather than results. Likewise, must turn away from sin, receive God's forgiveness, and serve the Lord.

## **APPLICATION**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What are your passions in life? What do others say your passions are?**

**Do your passions line up with how you spend your time, energy, and money? How can you align the many aspects of your life with the heart God has given you for the gospel?**

**What are some practical steps you can take to participate in ministries at our church?**

## What opportunities are available to our group to serve God in our community?

### PRAY

Pray for the hearts of the people in your group and the people in the community. Ask that God would give your group a heart for serving the church and the community. Thank God for what Christ did and that your mission, mind, and heart are conforming to the likeness of Christ.

### COMMENTARY

#### ACTS 28:17-31

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28:17. Paul therefore summoned the Jewish leaders in Rome to him. His usual pattern of witness in a new city was to begin with his own people, the Jews. He was not free to visit the synagogues of the city. He could, however, bring the members of the synagogues to himself. Rome seems to have had several synagogues, each somewhat independent of the others. Paul probably invited the ruling elders of each synagogue. He had several concerns to share with them. First, he wanted to offset any negative rumors about himself that might have come from the Jews at Jerusalem to hamper his witness to the Roman Jews. When the leaders arrived, Paul explained that the charges Jerusalem Jews had brought against him were false. He had not taught contrary to the Jewish law nor had he spoken against the ancient Jewish customs.

28:17-21. Paul noted that the Romans had found him innocent of any capital crime. He probably had the judgment of Festus and Agrippa in mind (25:25; 26:32). Paul explained what had brought him to Rome: his forced appeal to the emperor. Paul had a second concern: He wanted to assure the Roman Jews that he harbored no ill-feelings against them. The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem had sought to condemn him, but Paul had no inclination to make counter-charges. The Roman Jews could well have worried about that possibility. Should Paul, a Roman citizen, be found innocent by the emperor, the decision could backfire against the Jewish community.

Paul's main reason for calling the Jewish leaders was not to explain his situation but rather to deal with theirs. He wanted to share the gospel—the “hope of Israel”—with them. That the Roman Jews had not heard any word about Paul seems strange. Perhaps the Jerusalem Jews were trying to distance themselves as much as possible from the case against Paul. He wanted the leaders to assist him in arranging for a larger group of Roman Jews to hear him present the gospel.

28:22. The Jewish leaders were a receptive audience. They told Paul that they had heard rumors about the Christians and wanted to know more. Perhaps some of them already had debated with Roman Christians, but they wanted to hear Paul's views.

28:23. On a prearranged date, a much larger group of Jews appeared at Paul's house to hear him present the gospel. He preached all day about the kingdom of God, which is God's sovereign rule in the hearts of individuals. He showed how God's rule came to us supremely through Jesus Christ. They were Jewish and would be familiar with the Scriptures. Paul sought to convince them through all the Scripture, both the Law and the Prophets, that Christ is the long-awaited Messiah. This was his usual manner of witnessing to Jews (17:2-3).

28:24. The Jewish response to Paul's testimony was mixed. Some believed, but others rejected the gospel. Paul often experienced divided responses. Frequently his testimony in the synagogues evoked so much controversy that he had to abandon his witness there altogether. In such circumstances, he turned to the Gentile community, where he found people more receptive to his message (13:44-48; 18:5-7; 19:8-10).

28:25-27. The negative response seemed to dominate among the Roman Jews. Paul shared one final Scripture with them, which applied tragically to themselves. Paul referred to the words that God spoke to Isaiah at the time of his call (Isa. 6:9-10). God warned Isaiah that his task would not be easy. He would be witnessing to a people who had become blind, hard of hearing, and calloused of heart. They would hear the words of the prophet but not absorb or act on the message. They would see the truth, but they actually would be blind, because they would not take the message to heart by changing their will and deeds. If they truly heard and saw, they would turn to God in genuine repentance.

28:28. When so many of the Roman Jews failed to accept Paul's witness, Paul responded in a familiar manner, turning to the Gentiles. Paul was not giving up on his fellow Jews. The question was not one of excluding Jews but rather of including Gentiles. God had shown Paul that He was including Gentiles in the salvation brought by Christ. He had blessed Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. Throughout his ministry, though, Paul wrestled with his own people's poor response to the

gospel. Paul never abandoned his efforts to lead them to Christ, but at the same time he learned to put his energy where he received the greatest response.

28:30. For two years Paul awaited his trial before Caesar. He probably did not even note the passage of time. He was too busy witnessing to all who came to see him. This had been the story of Paul's entire ministry. He preached to everyone. He adapted his approach to his audience. To the Jews he preached as a Jew; to the Gentiles he became as a Gentile—all with the single goal of leading everyone to Christ (1 Cor. 9:19-23). Paul also adapted his witness to his personal circumstances. For example, he wrote the Philippians about how his imprisonment had not hampered his testimony about the gospel. Instead, the gospel flourished as he witnessed even to the prison guards and as his own bold testimony challenged other Christians to greater witnessing (Phil. 1:12-14).

28:31. Paul's message of the kingdom and his words about Jesus were closely related. God's kingdom is His kingly rule in people's lives. Jesus brought God's kingdom to us and made it possible for us to be a part of God's people when He died and removed the barrier of sin that separates us from God. When we accept Christ, we belong to God's kingdom; His Spirit rules in our lives.

### **ISAIAH 6:8-13**

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6:8. After removing the prophet's sin, the Lord issued a call to service. Salvation must precede service. The Lord sought a volunteer to deliver His message of warning to the people of Judah. The use of the plural pronoun "Us" in reference to God is found elsewhere in the Old Testament (Gen. 1:26; 11:7). Some consider this usage to be a "plural of majesty" (use of plural by a royal person to refer to himself or herself). Others accept another possibility: that the use of the plural suggests the doctrine of the Trinity (one God revealed in three Persons). The Lord was surrounded by angelic messengers (seraphim), but He desired a human messenger to confront the sinful nation. Isaiah, after he was cleansed from his sin, said, "Send me."

6:9. Isaiah may have thought God would use him to bring national revival to Judah. Instead, Isaiah learned that the people would not repent. His preaching would have a hardening effect on their hearts. The rebellious nation would not understand and not perceive the need for confession of sin and repentance. The fault would not be Isaiah's preaching but the people's unbelieving hearts and stubborn resistance. The seed of God's Word would fall on hard ground, and there would be no positive change.

6:10. The two phrases, "dull the minds" and "deafen their ears," must be understood as the result of Isaiah's faithful preaching and not as the intent of his preaching. Isaiah would not conceal truth or seek to mislead the people. He would faithfully preach the consequences of sin, but the people's rejection of the truth would only increase their sin. This verse introduces us to Isaiah's use of the important verb "healed" in reference to spiritual illness. The sickness of sin is more deadly than any physical illness. Isaiah revealed the only cure for the sickness of sin in chapter 53.

6:11. Isaiah understood the difficult mission before him and asked how long it would take. God told him the end result would be judgment and destruction of the nation. God had conditioned the original possession of the land and His protection of the people on their obedience to His commands (Deut. 28:15). Isaiah would not live to see the destruction of Judah, but his prophecy would continue to speak to the nation up to the time of destruction and even beyond it.

6:12. God's judgment on the majority in Judah would be deportation to a foreign land. Babylonia would be the instrument, but Isaiah said the Lord "drives the people far away." God chose this foreign nation to punish and discipline His people. They would see their cities destroyed and their property taken, and then they would be taken captive to Babylon.

6:13. Despite the terrible predictions of destruction and deportation, God promised hope for the future of Judah. The tree (terebinth or the oak) represented the nation, and it would be felled. A remnant (stump) of people (holy seed) would remain in the land as an indication of God's future restoration of the nation. The mention of the remnant refers to God's faithfulness to preserve a believing minority (Rom. 11:5).