

Lesson 23: The End?

Acts 28

Today, we come to the close of our story. As we've peered into the life of the early church through the eyes of Luke, we have been challenged and puzzled and encouraged. I have grown admittedly attached to some of these characters, and Luke was not particularly concerned with tying up loose ends. Acts 28 ends with no fanfare. There is no finality, no closure. It hardly seems fair to have drawn us into the narrative and then shut the book in the middle of the action.

What will we do with what we have seen? What will we do with our stories in response to theirs?

There is a temptation, I think, to write these men off as heroic, to see their stories as unique and almost other-worldly. That is to have missed the entire point. These men and their circumstances were not fables or fairytales. God didn't give us His Word to show us how things *used to be*. He hasn't changed! The same purpose and power that were available to those early apostles are available to us. Looking to Peter and Paul and James and John, might we be encouraged to live lives of purpose for the honor and glory of Jesus Christ? Looking to the Holy Spirit, might we find the same grace and power that was available to the early church? When it's His power and His grace that changes us, well, that changes everything.

May the twenty-eight chapters of Acts stir in us a hunger for the Lord who still writes stories for His glory in the lives of those who seek Him.

On Malta

Read Acts 28:1-10. Find Malta on your map. Here the sailors, soldiers and passengers dragged themselves to shore after their ship struck the reef.

1. What happened to Paul as they gathered wood for the fire after their arrival in Malta? How did the local people explain Paul's trouble?

“And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.”

Acts 28:30-31

2. As the people of Malta did, we sometimes mistake another's misfortune for some kind of divine retribution. What are some common phrases that we use to suggest that someone deserves their difficult circumstances?

3. What did Jesus teach in John 9:1-3? What was the purpose of the man's blindness? Apply Jesus' teaching to Paul's situation. How does it relate to our present-day clichés?

4. What miracle took place in Acts 28:5-6? What did Jesus list as signs that would accompany those who believed in Him in Mark 16:17-18?

Paul did not tempt fate. However, when the opportunity arose to walk in the promises of Christ, he walked boldly.

5. Where did Paul and his companions stay for three days in Malta according to Acts 28:7? What did Paul do there in Acts 28:8, and what happened after that?

6. Look back to Lesson 9, which focused on God's healing.
 - ❖ From #7 on page 60, what is Jesus able to heal?

 - ❖ What was your answer to #11 on page 61? What were you seeking His healing for? How have you seen Him respond since then?

7. After the winter, the travelers were ready to continue on their way to Rome. As they departed Malta, how were they treated?

Arrival in Rome

Read Acts 28:11-22. Paul has been angling for Rome since way back in Acts 19:21, nearly four years earlier. Finally, he arrived. Map the final few stops of Paul's journey as it is recorded by Luke.

8. Remember that Paul had already sent the letter of Romans to the believers at Rome. Who greeted him upon his arrival according to Acts 28:14-15? How did Paul respond to them?

9. What did Luke call the believers in Rome in Acts 28:14-15? How did Paul refer to believers in Galatians 6:10?

10. How have you experienced being in the household or family of believers?

11. Where did Paul stay in Rome according to Acts 28:16?

12. Who did Paul call together after he had been in Rome for three days? What was his purpose in assembling them?

13. How did the Jews in Rome respond to Paul according to Acts 28:21-22?

14. According to the Jews in verse 22, how did the masses speak of the “sect” of Christianity at this point in history?

15. Do you know how it feels to be spoken against because of your belief in Christ? What did Jesus say about it in Luke 6:22-23?

Paul’s Testimony in Rome

Finish reading the Book of Acts – Acts 28:23-31! We see Paul continuing his ministry pattern, reaching out first to the Jews in Rome with the hope that some might be saved.

16. Paul spoke of the kingdom of God. Looking to #20 of Lesson 13 on page 90-91, what are some points that you want to remember about the kingdom of God?

17. Paul tried to convince the Jews that Christ was the Messiah by calling upon the Law and the Prophets. To what did Paul attribute his chains in Acts 28:20? What is that hope?

We again see the all too familiar and heartbreaking rejection of the gospel by the majority of the Jews.

18. What was the final statement of Paul that led to their departure in Acts 28:25-28? Why would this have been particularly upsetting to the Jews?

Since the establishment of the early church, the relationship of Jews and Gentiles has often been strained and complicated.

19. In Luke 22:19-20, what did Jesus say that He established with His death and resurrection?

20. The same new covenant was spoken of by the prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 31:31-34. That covenant was specifically promised to whom?

21. Paul spoke of the mystery of God's covenant with the Jews and Gentiles in Romans 9-11. Look specifically at Romans 11:25-32.
 - ❖ What has happened to Israel – the Jews – according to verse 25? Why?

 - ❖ What is the eventual promise for Israel from verses 26-27?

 - ❖ How do you think God views Israel in light of Romans 11:28-29?

22. According to Acts 28:30-31, how did Paul spend his next two years imprisoned in Rome? How did Luke describe his ministry during that time?

Luke says that Paul was “unhindered” in his ministry in Rome (Acts 28:31). During this time, Paul wrote the letters to the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians and Philemon.

23. Consider Paul’s words in Philippians 3:7-16 and 4:11-13. Why might Paul have been particularly unhindered during these years?

24. What do you see as the difference between without hindrance and without obstacles? Is your life free of obstacles? What would it look like to live your life unhindered?

After two years in prison, Paul was likely released for a period of time. However, Paul died a martyr’s death about five years after his release. Paul’s ministry was certainly not unopposed, but in the freedom of Christ and the power of the Spirit that dwelt within him, Paul was unhindered. I pray the same might be said of us!

Prepare for Life

In Acts 1:8, the resurrected Christ promised His disciples: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” I see no evidence that that promise has changed. The power that was promised to them is available to us. Peter and James and John and Paul had powerful ministries. They had servants’ hearts and the Spirit’s strength. They laid down their lives as they had seen their Savior do. And I don’t just mean they died for Him. They lived for Him, too. By His power. By His grace.

25. Have you asked the Lord to grant You His power and grace by His Spirit? If you are willing, take some time, with open hands and an open heart, to ask Him to awaken your spirit to the Spirit that dwells within you. Ask His Holy Spirit to fill you with power to do His will.

Here Luke’s story ends. I imagine Theophilus, the initial recipient of Luke’s account, flipping over that last page of what we now know as the Book of Acts. “That’s it? Then what, Luke?” And Luke, who in my mind was a laid-back, understated man, half-smiled at his friend, “You tell me. What happens next?”

“I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

Ephesians 3:14-21

Lecture Notes: Lesson 23