

We are finishing up Acts this morning. Paul has been put on trial, handed over by the Jews to the Romans for sedition. He has appealed to Rome for his own safety, because he didn't think he could get a fair trial in Jerusalem, and so he is on his way to Rome in this last chapter.

Acts 28:1-31 - Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. ² The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. ³ Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. ⁴ When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." ⁵ But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. ⁶ The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god. ⁷ There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably. ⁸ His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. ⁹ When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. ¹⁰ They honored us in many ways and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed. ¹¹ After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island. It was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. ¹² We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. ¹³ From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. ¹⁴ There we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. ¹⁵ The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged. ¹⁶ When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him. ¹⁷ Three days later he called together the leaders of the Jews. 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 But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar-- not that I had any charge to bring 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." ²¹ They replied, "We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of the brothers 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." ²³ They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. *From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.* ²⁴ Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. ²⁵ They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: 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.' 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 *Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Interestingly, we do not see the end of the story here for Paul. For two years, Paul stays under house arrest, either because the courts were backed up or because it gave time for prosecutors to come forward. Church history says that Paul was released but later rearrested, imprisoned, condemned, and executed under the reign of Nero. But Luke ends with a statement that sums up Paul's life.

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This final statement is in line with the main thrust of the New Testament and the call to believers to share the gospel:

Matthew 28:18-20 - Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the **ministry of reconciliation**: ¹⁹ that God was

reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

I want to use this morning to reflect upon Paul's ministry and to sum up the book of Acts as we reflect on what we are called to do as believers. Three key themes that are repeated here in how he preached the kingdom and taught about Jesus:

1) Empowered by the Spirit

Acts begins with Jesus ascending to heaven and then sending His Spirit to be God with us, empowering us for spiritual living so that we can do what can not be done in our flesh.

Acts 1:4-8 - On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about.⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."⁶ So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Because Jesus has ascended, we don't just have a Jesus in the flesh on the earth, but instead we have God within each of us by His Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 - Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

You have spiritual life and spiritual gifts. Even when you are in chains like Paul, you are free inside because of the Holy Spirit in you. The spirit gives boldness.

Romans 8:15-16 - For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

2 Timothy 1:7 - For God did not give us a spirit of **timidity**, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

One of my favorite accounts of the difference the Spirit makes is from the life of D.L. Moody:

In the summer of 1871 two women of Dwight L. Moody's congregation felt an unusual burden to pray for Moody "that the Lord would give him the baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire." Moody would see them praying in the front row of his church and he was irritated. But soon he gave in and in September began to pray with them every Friday afternoon. He felt like his ministry was becoming a sounding brass with little power. On November 24, 1871, Moody's church building was destroyed in the great Chicago fire. He went to New York to seek financial help. Day and night he would walk the streets desperate for the touch of God's power in his life. Then suddenly,

*One day, in the city of New York—oh, what a day!—I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it; it is almost too sacred an experience to name . . . I can only say that God revealed himself to me, and I had such an experience of his love that I had to ask him to stay his hand. I went to preaching again. The sermons were not different; I did not present any new truths, and yet hundreds were converted. I would not now be placed back where I was before that blessed experience if you should give me all the world—it would be small dust in the balance. (W. R. Moody, *The Life of D. L. Moody*, New York: 1900, p. 149)*

Walk by the Spirit, empowered by God. Don't settle for average.

2) Culturally inclusive

Paul always shares the gospel in a way that is tailored to his audience, whether they are Jew or Gentile. To the Jew, he preaches the gospel in the context of the larger story of Israel – he talks about the law, sin and forgiveness to traditional people.

To the Gentiles, he talks about the clues for God, what they are looking for and how God meets those needs. In today's world, examples would be a perfect love that never leaves, knowing our lives have eternal significance, being free from all that holds us back, to be rid of our faults and to become perfect, and for good to triumph over evil.

Either way, we need to be able to defend the faith and explain it

*1 Peter 3:15-16 - But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with **gentleness and respect**, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*

Like Paul, we need to be able to share the gospel with respect to people's cultures and backgrounds.

3) In word and in deed

They don't just share the gospel in word, but in deed, proclaiming the kingdom of God by good works. The early church in Acts 2 devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and met needs as they arose. The apostles teaching was about all that Jesus did, sharing the good news – not good advice – of the gospel, that through repentance and faith we could be restored to a right relationship with God.

But it wasn't just preaching, but financial care, healing, casting out demons, and administrating a movement of care. We are stewards of all that is God's.

In Acts, we see the creation of both elders and deacons. The church needs shepherds and servants, people transformed by the love of God, willing to suffer and sacrifice as Christ did for him. The spirit gives a real love for people:

*1 Thessalonians 2:6-8 - We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, ⁷ but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. ⁸ We loved you so much that we were **delighted** to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.*

The book of Acts, and the life of Paul, challenge us to go and be witnesses, empowered by the Spirit, sharing the good news of Jesus in word and deed to all cultures.