



The End...or the Beginning? (Acts 28)

We Did It!

As we begin our sermon time, I'd just like to ask you to stand...raise your hands in the air...and celebrate the conclusion of our Acts Sermon Series with a big cheer!!!! (Woohoo!)

(You can be seated!)

What a journey! This sermon series has taken up 28 weeks of 2023. Aside from a handful of weeks where we had guest speakers, this has been our focus since January 1 (before the Chiefs even won the Super Bowl!)...week in and week out...serving as a bit of consistency as our church has gone through some unexpected transitions!

We have had the privilege of looking in on the early church, exploring its formation in the days and weeks after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. We've seen the Holy Spirit take the reins and guide the people to follow God with obedience and humility, even as they've participated in the miraculous!

The book has answered a lot of questions and raised a lot of questions. It has served as a springboard for topics that are important to us as individuals and as the church collectively. It has given us godly examples to follow. It has challenged us to be changed.

In short, it's been a good book! But all good things must come to an end, and so today we will be looking at Acts 28.

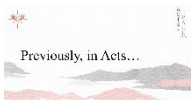
Previously, in Acts...

Now, as you know, I like to give a little recap of previous material for those who missed a week or as a quick reminder for those who were here. Lots of TV shows use a similar technique to help their audiences stay connected and remember key plot points they might have forgotten in case they weren't binge-watching the last episode two minutes ago.

Bonus Content: BibleProject.Com

For today's recap, I'm going to hand things over to our worship tech team. In just a minute, they will be playing a video from a group called the **BibleProject**. You've probably seen of their work before, especially if you've been part of a Bible study class here at TCC. They make concise, quality, animated content that shines a spotlight on Bible books, topics, words, themes, and more.

In your own study time, their material can serve as a helpful resource to get you up to speed quickly. For instance, they produce overview videos of each book of the Bible, showing you the key people, themes, and structure of the book. Before you start reading, you can have an idea of what to look for and where it is going.



Videos like this can be a great tool! But my endorsement comes with a caution...

WARNING: The videos are NOT a substitute for God's Word! You can't just watch these and think that you've learned enough. Keep your Bible open. Don't ever stop reading the text and listening to the actual Word of God!

Have you ever read or watch Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory? Remember Violet Beauregarde? She was a gum-chewer, and in the factory, she couldn't resist the temptation to chew an experimental piece of gum that contained an entire three-course dinner: tomato soup, roast beef with baked potato, and blueberry pie. It starts out fine, but as she continues to chew, the results are repulsive, revolting, and wrong. Violet reaches the third course, and the gum causes her to swell up into a giant blueberry!

The gum held promise, but it was no substitute for the real thing!

Will you blow up into something terrible from watching videos like this? No. But just like a piece of gum is a bad substitute for a real meal, a summary or a paraphrase of the Bible will never replace the power of what has been revealed in God's Word. You NEED to be in Scripture and get to know it yourself, rather than what others tell you about it. You need to experience what God really says.

Please use videos like this as a tool to help you engage Scripture *more*...not less!!!

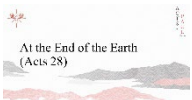
With that disclaimer, let's remind ourselves of how we got to chapter 28 and see a little preview of what's to come. This is Part 4 of their Acts series:



Watch "Bound for Rome: Acts 21-28" – Bible Project (4:49)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJsiwOBOPvg>

Got it? I think it's a great summary of how we got to this point in Acts, but as we said, it's important to be in the text itself. So let's see what God's Word has to teach us as we head to the "end of the earth"



At the End of the Earth (Acts 28)

After the Shipwreck (28:1-10)

The opening verses of chapter 28 continue to show that Paul has been *PROTECTED FOR A PURPOSE*, like we discussed last week. He survived the shipwreck, but he continues to face danger.



"As Paul gathered an armful of sticks and was laying them on the fire, a poisonous snake, driven out by the heat, bit him on the hand. The people of the island saw it hanging from his hand and said to each other, "A murderer, no doubt! Though he escaped the sea, justice will not permit him to live." But Paul shook off the snake

into the fire and was unharmed. The people waited for him to swell up or suddenly drop dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw that he wasn't harmed, they changed their minds and decided he was a god." (Acts 28:3–6, NLT)

Of course, he's no god. But Luke (the author) wants us to see that the One True God was watching out for Paul! As a result, Paul can minister to the people of Malta -- The Holy Spirit works through him, granting people physical healing from sicknesses and disease – and he can continue his journey. Because Malta wasn't the destination; Rome was.

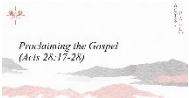


On to Rome (28:11-16)

When the seasons changed, and sailing was safer in a post-winter Mediterranean, Paul and his captors continued their journey.

"It was three months after the shipwreck that we set sail on another ship that had wintered at the island—an Alexandrian ship with the twin gods as its figurehead. Our first stop was Syracuse, where we stayed three days. From there we sailed across to Rhegium. A day later a south wind began blowing, so the following day we sailed up the coast to Puteoli. There we found some believers, who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. The brothers and sisters in Rome had heard we were coming, and they came to meet us at the Forum on the Appian Way. Others joined us at The Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he was encouraged and thanked God. When we arrived in Rome, Paul was permitted to have his own private lodging, though he was guarded by a soldier."
(Acts 28:11–16, NLT)

Paul will be under house arrest as he awaits his time before Caesar (another two years!), but the situation isn't too bad. He has freedom to bring in guests, and after he settles in, that's exactly what he does.



Proclaiming the Gospel (28:17-28)¹

Paul invites the Jewish leaders from the area (following his normal pattern of starting with the Jewish community when he arrives in a new town) and they gather to hear what Paul has to say.

"So a time was set, and on that day a large number of people came to Paul's lodging. He explained and testified about the Kingdom of God and tried to persuade them about Jesus from the Scriptures. Using the law of Moses and the books of the prophets, he spoke to them from morning until evening. Some were persuaded by the things he said, but others did not believe. And after they had argued back and forth among themselves, they left with this final word from Paul:

¹ If it comes up: Acts 28:29 is not part of the main text. It's probably in your Bible's footnotes or in brackets. Some ancient manuscripts have an added line of text, but the earliest and most accurate manuscripts don't.

“The Holy Spirit was right when he said to your ancestors through Isaiah the prophet, ‘Go and say to this people: When you hear what I say, you will not understand. When you see what I do, you will not comprehend. For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes— so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, and their hearts cannot understand, and they cannot turn to me and let me heal them.’ So I want you to know that this salvation from God has also been offered to the Gentiles, and they will accept it.” (Acts 28:23–28, NLT)

Not surprisingly, Paul’s mission to the Gentiles earns him a cold reception. At least this time the Jews didn’t try to kill him! But Paul isn’t there to win popularity; he’s there to preach about Jesus and to share him with as many as possible.



The End? (28:30-31)

The last lines of the book are – at first blush – somewhat unsatisfying from a narrative standpoint. After investing so much time in the story of Paul arriving in Rome, we’re ready for a big confrontation between Paul and Emperor Nero! We’re ready to see Paul win over this ruler to Jesus, or to see Nero stamp out Paul’s ministry and end the story!

But Luke doesn’t give us that. Here’s how the book ends:

“For the next two years, Paul lived in Rome at his own expense. He welcomed all who visited him, boldly proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one tried to stop him.” (Acts 28:30–31, NLT)

That’s it! That’s the ending... no big finale, no fireworks, no real conclusion to Paul’s situation.



What happens next?

So what actually happens next? For those of you who really need to know the historical ending, here’s what happens to Paul (based on tradition – since nothing more is stated).

Early church tradition suggests:

- Paul was acquitted of his charges (around 63 AD)
- Travelled farther west, all the way to modern-day Spain (63-67 AD)
 - o Maybe wrote letters to Timothy and Titus during this period...
- Arrested again and subject to harsher punishments (now that Nero was an enemy of Christianity)
- Paul was executed by beheading outside of Rome (67 AD)

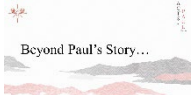
Why not share it here?

So why not share that part of the story here? Well, Luke ended Acts without those details predominantly because history caught up to the present! He wrote this book *before* those things had happened to Paul!

But his word choice also serves the story well. As Luke writes the ending, he leaves it *open*. Paul is shown preaching the gospel, and the reader is given no stopping point for this

activity. In fact, the final word of the book is a single word that translates Paul activities as happening “without hindrance.”

Paul is at his destination, and the gospel is proclaimed...freely, and fully. Paul was able to preach and teach “without hindrance!” His story was free to continue. And with his story, the story of God could also continue...from him to us!



Beyond Paul's Story...

I know I've been hammering this “story” theme for a couple sermons but stick with me. It matters! Luke's ending helps us go beyond the narrative at hand.

A Bigger Story

Have you ever noticed that no story is fully complete?

Some stories are compelling and fit a wonderful arc, but there is always so much more that could be told! A bigger story always exists that involves more people and more purpose.

As I was studying this passage (Acts 28) for today's sermon, I was struck by a couple of details Luke included which stretched the story arc.

We've framed the story of Acts as one of expansion, following Jesus' words in Acts 1:8.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8, NLT)

In this telling, Rome was presented as the ultimate destination where Paul would bring the gospel. Paul would go before the emperor as the missionary to the Gentiles, bringing Jesus to the capital of the known world!

And that's true. It's a faithful interpretation of Luke's work. It's an accurate perspective on Paul's journey. But it's narrow. Paul is not the only one in the story!



Have you seen pictures of Mt. Everest? The tallest peak in the world is a beacon to adventurers. Climbing the mountain is a test of endurance and stamina. It is dangerous, but making a successful climb is a goal that has beckoned mountain climbers ever since it was first conquered in 1953. It seems like such a remote and isolated task, 29,000+ feet above sea level...yet the biggest challenge now is overcrowding!

*Others are on the path! “Despite the risks, Everest draws hundreds of mountaineers from around the world to its slopes each year. In 2021, the Nepal Ministry of Tourism issued a record 408 Everest climbing permits, the highest in its history.”*²

² [What to know about climbing Mount Everest \(nationalgeographic.com\)](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/destinations/asia/everest-climbing/)

Paul isn't the only one on *his* path either. On the road to Rome, and in the communities surrounding Rome, we find other Christians! Look back at verses 14-15.

Acts 28:14-15
"There we found some believers who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. The brothers and sisters in Rome had heard we were coming, and they came to meet us at the Forum on the Appian Way. Others joined us at The Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he was encouraged and thanked God."

*"There **we found some believers**, who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. The **brothers and sisters in Rome** had heard we were coming, and they came to meet us at the Forum on the Appian Way. Others joined us at The Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he was encouraged and thanked God."*
(Acts 28:14–15, NLT)

Paul isn't showing up in Rome to *create* a church. No, one already exists! Paul wrote to them five years prior to his arrival in the city, in his NT letter to the Romans:

Romans 1:7
"I am writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God and are called to be his own holy people. May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace."

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Later in that same letter, he names names! He has a list of over 25 people he greets – Christians who are in Rome! For example:

Romans 16:6-8
"Give my greetings to Mary, who has worked so hard for your benefit. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews, who were in prison with me. They are highly respected among the apostles and became followers of Christ before I did. Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord."

"Give my greetings to Mary, who has worked so hard for your benefit. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews, who were in prison with me. They are highly respected among the apostles and became followers of Christ before I did. Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord." (Romans 16:6–8, NLT)

The names are tongue-twisters, but they are evidence that the gospel story has been happening independently of Paul for years!

Luke's story that we have been reading in Acts is true (Jerusalem/Judea-Samaria/Ends of the Earth)...but it isn't complete. And its impact is greater than Luke ever dreamed!

Paul's Impact

Paul viewed his own story in a way similar to the way Luke viewed it.

Paul's Impact
"And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear."

"And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear." (Philippians 1:12–14, NLT)

He thinks that his biggest impact is in the number of people he encountered. And that number is large! Entire congregations exist in Asia Minor and Greece because of his ministry and his message. Hundreds, maybe thousands of believers can trace their love for Jesus back to a direct encounter they had with Paul of Tarsus.

But have you considered that those believers are just a fraction of the people Paul impacted? His mission to the Gentiles might have been more impacted by his pen! As Paul planted, encouraged, and built up churches across the empire on his mission trips, he wrote words of wisdom to them.



Using the occasion of communication with a church, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write words that were so helpful to those Christians that they copied them and shared them with others. His letters answered questions that church members had, challenged congregations to follow the way of Jesus, encouraged believers to remain steadfast and faithful, and taught them important doctrines. Those letters helped not only the original audience, but also the ones who got the copies...and the copies of copies. The letters were recognized as being divinely inspired, and they were preserved and eventually canonized as part of the New Testament.

13 of the 27 books of the New Testament bear Paul's name. No other person outside of Jesus had more impact on the faith of the church than Paul. His words have guided more Gentiles – two millennia worth! Billions! – than his personal presence ever did.

And several of those key letters were prompted by his time in Rome, in prison. We wouldn't have the words of Ephesians, Colossian, Philippians, or Philemon if Paul wasn't under house arrest.

God's story for the church was bigger than Paul. God's plan for Paul's impact was bigger than he ever dreamed!



Beyond Our Story...

During this series, I've asked you to remember whose story you are in. I've challenged you to see your own story as a snippet within God's bigger story of salvation. I've encouraged you to tell your story to others – to talk about who you *were*, who you *are*, and Who made the change.

But the ending of Acts should be a challenge for you to remember that the story you see yourself in isn't complete, nor is it your own!

Have you ever heard of the Acts 29 network?

If you aren't in ministry, you probably haven't. But it is a church-planting network that is actively planting churches in North America and across the globe. I'm not concerned with the details of the organization this morning – just the name. They took the idea that we are "in a bigger story" and called themselves the "Acts 29 Network." Acts has twenty-eight chapters, so the idea was that this network of churches would be part of the continuing story of the early church.

While the group has had some issues with its leadership over the years, the name itself reflects the right mentality!

How will the story continue?

Remember that your own story is going to be expanded! God is going to use you in ways that you never dreamed! Paul knew that the gospel was spreading in places where he had never been and never would be. But even he didn't expect millions of copies of his letters to be printed and carried around in the hands of churchgoers around the globe centuries later!

Your story is going to be expanded! God may upsize your impact. He may extend your influence. He may increase your reputation. He may take the seed of your faith and create a forest!

I shared my own story a couple of weeks ago – my testimony of what God had done in my life. I told you one of the big moments of transformation for me happened at a church camp – Cedar Bluffs Christian Service Camp. It was MY story, but it was influenced by ministers from other towns (Wade, Dan) and camp team members from Manhattan Christian College (Jeff) who I promise don't even remember my name. But God took their story and expanded it! Their work put me on a trajectory that led here...and not just me, but several other kids (Kent, Heath, Seth, Joel, Cory, Yvonne) who ended up in Bible college and later serving in ministry.

It's all bigger than we realize.

God may have street-level plans to expand the gospel in your family or neighborhood through your influence. Or He may have grander ambitions to use you globally, through your social media presence or a mission trip or a kid you're raising.

Whenever you hear the story of Acts, let it remind you of His plans. See how much it expands beyond the simple, neat story we have made our focus! I promise that the more you dig, the more you'll be amazed at what God has done when you've been faithful!

Conclusion

Since we're in that kind of story – the kind that is guaranteed to expand - then it highlights how important every day is! It shows us how powerful every encounter can be! We don't know the ripples that a moment of obedience might create. You don't know the lives that could be redirected to Jesus by a gracious word, a bold statement of truth, or an act of kindness. We can't fathom the tapestry that the Spirit is starting with you as the first stitch. And we have no idea how much we miss when we fail to listen!

So be faithful now. Be available now. Be humble now. Be obedient now.

The Holy Spirit was at work throughout Acts, expanding the story through men like Paul and Peter. And I think some words from Peter are a fitting conclusion to this series, to remind us of how we are to live in this story. Think about how they describe men like Paul and Peter, and pray for God to help them apply to you as well:

“So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. (1 Peter 5:6–11, NLT)

Where will He expand His story with you? I'm excited to find out!

1 Peter 5:6-11
...Remember that your family of believers all over the world is being stretched by the same arms of majestic grace. In the meantime, don't let your pride or ego get in the way of your faith. Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. (1 Peter 5:6-11, NLT)



Prayer

Invitation

At our second service today, we're going to have a baptism – Kendall Wood (K Woo!) is ready to make that decision! Miss April will be helping her.

But if you are ready to make that same decision, we invite you to come up to the front as we stand and sing our invitation song...

SERMON NOTES

We Did It!

Previously, in Acts...

BibleProject.com

At the End of the Earth (Acts 28)

After the Shipwreck (28:1-10)

On to Rome (28:11-16)

Proclaiming the Gospel (28:17-28)

The End? (28:30-31)

Beyond Paul's Story...

A Bigger Story (Acts 1:8; Romans 1:7; Romans 16:6-8)

Paul's Impact (Philippians 1:12-14)

Beyond Our Story...

(1 Peter 5:6-11)

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Fellowship

- As we reach the end of this series on Acts, share the biggest takeaways you have gained from it. What part of the biblical story stands out to you? Why?

Exploration

- As Paul recovers from the shipwreck on Malta, what happens to him? (Acts 28:1-10) See Mark 16:15-20 to compare Jesus' words with Paul's events.
- What emotions do you think Paul felt as he arrived in Rome? Think about his goals and his experiences.
- Imagine you are the guard assigned to Paul. Who do you see coming in and out of his residence? See Acts 28:17, Colossians 4:7-18
- Read Acts 28:17-24. How do the Jewish leaders react to Paul? How is their reaction similar to or different from the reaction in Jerusalem? Why?
- What was the focus of Paul's preaching?
- Do you expect to have success when sharing Jesus with others? Is your success based on your skill at presenting or on something (or someone) else?
- Acts ends with Paul preaching the gospel "unhindered." What hindrances do we face today? Are they really hindrances, or are they excuses?
- What impact does Paul have beyond the people he encounters? Do you think his writings mattered more than his missionary journeys? Explain.
- If someone wrote about your spiritual impact, how would it compare to Acts? Are you satisfied with your story? If not, what needs to change?

Prayer

- Pray for the Holy Spirit's work to continue in Tonganoxie as much as it was in the book of Acts! Pray for opportunities to share Jesus, and for people to respond in faith.