



Acts 28:11-31
Conduct in a Crisis, Pt 3

Summary: When you are facing a crisis look for encouragement in fellowship, seek peace but stand on the truth, and persist with confidence in Christ.

We have spent the past year studying the book of Acts together, learning about the history of the early church and considering its application today. And what we have discovered is: this ancient book is extremely relevant to our modern lives. Back in May, as the nation reacted to the tragic death of George Floyd at the hands of law enforcement officers, we found ourselves studying Acts 16 where Paul and Barnabas suffered mistreatment at the hands of public officials and were unjustly incarcerated.

We've seen protests and riots in America and around the world and we've seen protests turn violent in Scripture.

As politics dominate today's headlines, we've watched as Paul stood before kings and governors 2000 years ago and considered how Christians should live as dual-citizens – loyal first and foremost to King Jesus who then appoints us as ambassadors – that's the Bible's term for us – we are ambassadors of Christ in the United States, in the Commonwealth of Virginia, in the County of Fairfax. We are not, first and foremost, Democrats, Republicans, or Independents – we may give those groups our vote, but we don't give them our hearts or our ultimate loyalty, because that belongs to King Jesus.

And now, here at the end of Acts, we have watched as crises compound for Paul and observed how a Christian should conduct themselves in difficult times. Paul has been in Roman custody for almost three years. He's endured several trials and inquiries, at least two assassination attempts, he nearly drowned at sea in a storm, was shipwrecked on Malta, and survived only to build a fire and then be bitten by a snake while adding sticks to the flames – it's been a rough stretch. But through it all, he has relied on the strength and power of the Holy Spirit, He has been fiercely loyal to King Jesus, and exceedingly patient with and kind to the people around him.

This morning, as he arrives in Rome, completing his journey, we make three final observations about the conduct of a Christian in crisis. First, look for encouragement in fellowship; second, seek peace, but stand for truth; and third, persist with confidence in Christ.

Let's read our passage - we pick up the story on the island of Malta where Paul and the group he was traveling with, the group that survived the shipwreck, have stayed for the winter.



Acts 28:11 After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island. 12 And landing at Syracuse (the capital of Sicily), we stayed three days. 13 From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli 14 where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days.

Puteoli was in the Bay of Naples near Pompeii. It was the main port of the Roman Empire, overlooked by Mt Vesuvius. Here they disembark and they'll travel the rest of the journey on foot.

(14 cont.) And so we went toward Rome. 15 And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns.

Appius was a major market located about 40 miles south of Rome and Three Inns was something like a rest area another 10 miles north – both were located on the Appian Way, the ancient highway leading to and from Rome. So, when Christians in Rome heard Paul was coming they walked for two to three days to come out and meet him. Pay close attention to what happened next:

When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

And so here is the first point I want to make this morning – fellowship provides encouragement in a crisis. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and was encouraged.

How many times has this been true in your life? You've been through, or you're going through, something difficult and then you get a call, a Direct Message, or a text, or so and so actually shows up at your desk or at your door and it suddenly changes everything. There's this sense of 'oh thank God, it's so good to see you!' Being with other people physically, and to a lesser extent virtually, seems to soften our suffering and give us strength.

Christian, you need to remember that God is always watching over you, and more than that, He is actually always with you – even in the storm. When you are frustrated, when you feel like things are out of control, when you feel things are falling apart, you need to remember, God is with you, and He is still in control.

Sometimes God will minister to you Himself – He will speak to you in the depths of your soul, He'll make a passage of Scripture stand out for you, He'll bring a line from a worship song to mind and press it into your thoughts. This is why you need to find, or make, time to pray, to read Scripture, and to quiet your mind and heart before God. You can't wait for the storm to be over so that you can do it in peace and quiet – you need to find, or make, time to do it even in the crisis. And when you do, you will often be encouraged directly by God.

At other times, He will send someone your way, or encourage you to go and join them and you will draw encouragement from being with other people, especially other believers in Christ.

Have you felt that sense of encouragement when you come to church or your small group? I've seen it happen, especially in the midst of COVID – people see each other and ask that awkward – “are you OK with a hug or a handshake?” and they make connection and it feels good. It feels encouraging. It's nourishment for your soul – to know that you are not alone and that other people are still here and they're OK. It's why I want to encourage you: when it comes to COVID, be both a little cavalier and a little cautious – use wisdom and find ways to be around each other and encourage each other because your spiritual health is important too.

That's actually something we've been pretty good at around here. We've been finding ways to encourage each other – with little notes and cards, delivering meals, making cookies, inviting people over for dinner on the patio or inside, or to go out for a walk or a workout – we're finding ways to stay carefully connected.

I'm asking you, please, keep doing it. And, keep doing it *for the sake of being encouraging*. Do it as an act of worship. Do it with a motive, a good motive. Ask God to use what you're doing to bring encouragement to someone. Ask Him to show you who needs to be encouraged and marvel at the fact that God could do it Himself, or He could send angel – like He did with Paul on the ship in the storm, and yet He often uses ordinary people, just like these Christians on the road to Rome and that means He probably wants to use you too.

You have an amazing opportunity to be used by God to encourage others and you never know exactly what they're walking into next! So let's see what happens with Paul.

16 Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.

17 And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: “Men *and* brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, 18 who, when they had examined me, wanted to let *me* go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. 19 But when the Jews spoke against *it*, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. 20 For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see *you* and speak with *you*, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.”

When Paul arrives in Rome, he's still in custody, but he has a fair amount of freedom – this is likely due to three factors. First, he's a Roman citizen, and second as he mentions, he's not guilty of any Roman crimes, and third, Julius, the centurion who was responsible for

bringing him to Rome probably put in a good word for him. So, he has some restrictions yes, but he also has some significant freedoms.

And now that he has settled in, he calls for the leaders of the Jewish community and wants to speak to them, which brings me to our second point this morning: seek peace in the crisis, but stand for the truth.

Paul is in Rome because he was exercising his right to appeal and have his case heard by the Emperor. He did not want to do this, but the option was essentially forced on him since he could not get justice by any other means. His trial is going to make the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem look bad, but Paul wants the local leaders to know, he's not out for revenge.

In fact, he repeats the claim that we've seen before and marveled at: he says he has done nothing wrong in light of religious law *and* nothing wrong in light of Roman law. And that's a BIG challenge for you and me. Can you say: "I've done nothing wrong in the eyes of God and I've done nothing wrong in the eyes of the government?" Can you say: "I'm seeking, with every effort, to be a good citizen in the Kingdom of Heaven and the United States?" Christian, that's the goal – no matter who wins the election.

And remember, Paul made this claim under the Roman Empire which was publically crucifying people as punishment and where temples involving every kind of immorality were popular tourist destinations. If he could do it then, under those conditions, we should still try to do it now. Christians should be active citizens in a participatory democracy, seeking the good of the nation and all of it's people.

But, no matter how much good you do, some people will resist and reject you. That was the problem Paul faced. And so he tells the leaders of the Jewish community in Rome: 'I've done nothing wrong, but the Jews in Jerusalem opposed my release and I had to appeal, it was the only way out. So here I am, but I bear you no malice.'

I need you to stop and think about this, because it's huge, absolutely amazing! For thirty years Paul has travelled the Mediterranean – the countries of modern Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, and others and every time, in every city, he has tried to share the gospel with the Jews. Sometimes, they received him, but as often as not they drove him out of town, called him names, arrested him, tried to get the Romans to arrest him, they've even tried to kill him several times. The man has scars on his body *simply because he tried to tell people about Jesus Christ* for their own good.

And now he's in Rome, waiting to have his case heard before the most powerful man alive. It could end with a very painful death if the Emperor is in a bad mood, or distracted. And yet, it's still a priority for Paul to reach out *to the very people group* responsible for all this, and to tell them he means them no harm, he only wants their good.

Friends, right now there are forces at work trying to tear America apart, we are being pitted against each other and outrage fuels the headlines and your news feed: "can you

believe so and so did this? Did know that group is doing that? Did you know so and so said this?" All supported with shocking pictures and video of people doing whatever.

It's a strategy with tactics straight out of the pit of hell – we're being incited to hate or suspect everyone because they're a disease vector or an opposing voter. It's the exact opposite of the great commandment to Love God and Love Others.

Here in Scripture, we find Paul seeking peace. Again, and again. He shows forgiveness, hoping, 'maybe they'll listen this time.'

I need you to take note of this: Paul doesn't see 'the other side' as his mortal enemies; he sees them as people in need of Jesus.

And brothers and sisters that is absolutely what we need to pray that God would do for us. Because right now, there are banners and signs and symbols that trigger you. They trigger me. There are names that you hear and you immediately think bad thoughts. There are people and groups you think pose an existential threat to the country. And you may be right. Paul wasn't being extreme when he thought the Jews were trying to kill him, *they were*. They planned to ambush him. They swore an oath that they would do it.

But, he didn't hate them. He prayed for them, he wanted them to see, know, appreciate and understand Jesus more than any other thing.

And look, I don't think that's true of us. I don't think we weep for the people on the other side, whoever that is for you. I think we're afraid of them. I think we look down on them. I think we judge them. But I don't think we weep for them. We may pray for them - I don't think we do very often - but it might happen. Yet, when it does, it's usually prayers for judgment and destruction – "God, stop them." Is it ever a prayer for salvation?

Friends that is what Paul is praying. That is what Paul is seeking -because *that's the heart of Jesus*. He hung, bleeding on the cross and prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing." And now we look at people who hate us and we just hate them right back. And it's wrong, it's not what King Jesus tells us to do.

He said, in the famous Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:9 Blessed *are* the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.

And then you have Scriptures that says things like:

Romans 14:19 Therefore let us pursue the things *which make* for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

Hebrews 12:14 Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord

Christians, we should be seeking peace, even in the crisis.

So how do we do that? By asking God to help us see with His eyes, hear with His ears, think with His mind, and feel with His heart. In other words, by asking God to make us more like Christ.

But remember, loving like Jesus also means telling the truth, which will be divisive. That's OK. You can't help it, but always, always, seek to be motivated by love – as we see here with Paul.

21 Then they said to him, “We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. 22 But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.”

They say, we haven't heard anything about you, but we've heard a bunch of stuff about Jesus and the people who follow him – most it wasn't good, so we'd love to hear your take.

23 So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at *his* lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.

He started with the stuff they already believed, and he tried to make common ground that would lead to Jesus.

24 And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.

Friends, nothing has changed in history. You're sitting here today and some of you are persuaded and some of you disbelieve. That's not new. The claims of Christ have always been received by some and resisted by others. You can have the exact same questions as the person next to you, hear the exact same answer and respond in the totally opposite way because there is something else you're holding on to and you don't want to let it go and receive Jesus. That's nothing new, but it doesn't end well.

25 So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: “The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, 26 saying,

*‘Go to this people and say:
“Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand;
And seeing you will see, and not perceive;
27 For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,*

*And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.”*

28 “Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.

God offers us peace, and repeats the offer many times, but people still resist. Jesus, speaking of Himself, said “the light has come into the world, but men rejected the light and loved the darkness because their deeds were evil.”

Friends, there are people who hear, but won’t receive. There are people who see, but close their eyes. There are people who feel in their heart, but resist it, excuse it, and explain it away. And at some point, God says, OK, if that’s how you want it. There could have been peace, but instead there will be judgment. The truth should always be presented in love, but love never changes truth.

And now, notice what happens next. Paul tries to lovingly share the truth of the gospel with the Jewish community leaders, and he gets a mixed reaction, but that partial rejection doesn’t stop him or discourage him. Our third and final point this morning is, we must persist, with confidence, in the crisis.

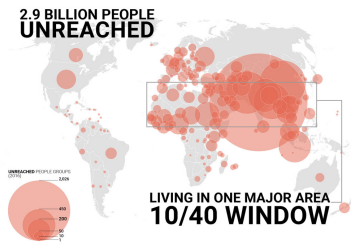
30 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

Church history says he was eventually released and went on a fourth missionary journey, possibly to Spain. During that time he wrote 1st Timothy and Titus, but he was eventually arrested again, and brought back to Rome. While in prison this time he wrote 2nd Timothy and was eventually taken outside the city limits and beheaded, but he called people to know and follow Christ until the very end.

The man had every reason to pull back a little. Life was hard. Opposition was everywhere. He could have gotten tired of it all. But he didn’t. He pressed on with knowing Christ and making Him known.

Christian, you are going to have plenty of reasons to give up. Plenty of reasons to pull back. Plenty of reasons to grow cold spiritually, or at least lukewarm. I’m praying that you will persist and more than that, that you will persist **with all confidence**. And, I’m praying your persistence will be an encouragement to others, that it won’t make you cynical or jaded, but that you’ll press on with joy, seeking peace as you stand on the truth.

And so, I want to encourage you to consider something this morning. If you grew up around church you’ve probably heard of unreached people groups – people with no, or little access



to the gospel, usually in the 10/40 window – a box created between 10 degrees and 40 degrees north latitude on the map. Most of the world’s population lives in this space and there many who have never heard the name of Jesus. We need to be praying for them and so some churches or people adopt an unreached people group, they learn about them, pray for them, and sometimes God calls them to get involved in trying to reach them.

It is not easy, but it is eternally significant.

I want to ask you to consider adopting a people group. But not one overseas, you can do that too, but I want to ask you to consider adopting a people group here in the United States, preferably one that irritates you or triggers you. The one whose signs and symbols you hate seeing. The one who provokes you and agitates you. It could be people in MAGA hats or people with a rainbow bumper sticker. It could be illegal immigrants or old white people. Whoever you blame. Whoever you react to. I’m asking you, to ask God, to give you His heart for those people.

And then pray for them. Every time they come up between now and the end of the year, pray for them. Paul spent 30 years trying to reach the Jews and suffered in the process but sought peace with them and persisted in his ministry. Ask God to give you a thirty-year heart for these people. Some of you don’t have that long left. Some of will need to ask again in a few decades.

Friends, people knew Jesus by His love, not by His anger, not by His shouting, not by antagonistic posts. And let’s be clear – not everyone liked Him. They still hated Him and put Him to death. But the soldier standing by at his crucifixion said “No one ever died like this man.” Asking “Father, forgive them for the they don’t know what they’re doing.”

Can you pray the same thing? Can you turn your heart over to Jesus that much? Can you ask God to teach you how to love the people you think are your enemies?

Only if you first know how much He loves you, what He forgives you of, and how patient He is with you.

Friends, the world is dark, we’re living through a crisis. But November 3rd is not the answer. No matter who wins, the fighting will continue, King Jesus is our only hope. So, can you do it? Can you receive the love, peace and patience of God yourself and then, like Paul, reflect it to others? And can you encourage each other along the way? Can you seek peace while standing for truth? Can you persist, with confidence that His kingdom will come, His will will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven?

Only by God’s grace.

Let’s Pray.