

“The End of the Beginning”

Acts 28

As we finish up the book of Acts today we need to remind ourselves of Luke's overall purpose. The gospel of Luke and Acts were both written to a man named Theophilus. In Acts 1:1 Luke writes about his gospel

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach

Acts, continues with Jesus still teaching but He ascends to His Father by vv.10-11 just after He told His disciples that they will continue His work in v.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.”

And we clearly see this progression in the book of Acts where the gospel starts in Jerusalem in Acts 2 when the Spirit comes on the disciples and they share the gospel and 6000 people repent and come to faith in Christ. These 6000 came from all over Israel and other places so we see Peter and John and the others spreading the gospel in Judea (Ch.'s 3-7) but persecution ensues and through the death of Stephen the gospel spreads to Samaria (Ch. 8) and Ch. 9-10 now to the Gentiles and then through a saved Saul and Barnabas, Silas, Mark and others the gospel gradually spreads throughout the Roman empire and we now come to Ch. 28 and Paul has reached Rome; and from here the gospel is reaching near the 'ends of the earth' as it comes to Rome.

But along the way Luke has mini-updates on how the gospel is progressing as it spreads from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth. The first one comes at Pentecost in Ch. 2:46:

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The next one comes when the disciples solve the widows problem by choosing more leaders:

^{6:7} So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Then when Paul is saved,

^{9:31} Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.

Then when the gospel has spread to the Gentiles,

^{12:24} But the word of God continued to spread and flourish.

The next one occurs after the Jerusalem council where they come together to agree on how Gentile and Jews should work together in the faith:

16:4 As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

Then in 19:20 after the miraculous work among the Ephesians who gave up their magic books and worship of Dianna/Artemis to follow Jesus:

19:20 In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

And there's one more which we'll see today. What's the common thread in all these? The Word of the Lord was spreading and more people were getting saved, from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and now to the ends of the earth.

Last week we ended Ch. 27 and God miraculously saves them from death from the storm and they crash on Malta. And they are still here in Ch. 28 where we read,

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.

Some of our translations may say Barbarians and not islanders. But barbarian simply means one who speaks a different language. And these Maltans are unusually kind because 276 Roman soldiers and prisoners crashing into your small village is something you'd be suspicious of and guarded against [protect the children, lock the doors!]. But they help Paul and the rest out as they are soaked, cold and hungry on this small island, still not in Rome.

But aren't we supposed to get to Rome? Isn't that the goal? I have work to do there. But God delays us and detours us because He has work He wants us to do for Him there. And God is going to do something here. But when we're so focused on our own agenda and achieving our goals that we forget

The 'Ends of the Earth' is Not the Goal: People Are **(28:1-10)**

The reason God even created you and gifted you is so you can connect with people for the gospel through your work connections, your community connections, your sports connections and your family connections. Your job/career is not your goal. Making the team is not the goal. Winning awards is not the goal. Having children and grandchildren is not "the goal" but God will use all those things so that we can reach people for Jesus through those avenues.

Paul is not freaking out and pacing impatiently because he hasn't gotten to Rome yet. What's he doing? Gathering wood for the fire. Why? Because that's what his fellow shipmates need who need warmth. And the Maltans need Jesus. So God arranges for Paul to be bitten by a snake - whom these superstitious islanders think the Greek god of Justice Dikee, has settled the score since Paul didn't die in the shipwreck. After all he's a prisoner so he must be guilty of something. But he doesn't die, so now these superstitious islanders think he's a god even though Paul makes no comment about these things.

However, it leads to the Maltese chief extending hospitality to them and it so happens his father is sick and Paul [who's got to reach his goal of Rome ignores and says too bad!]. No! The goal isn't Rome the goal is people

Who need to be served (vv.1-9, 11-14)

First he serves his fellow shipmates by getting wood. Then he serves the Maltese chief by praying for his father and laying hands on him and he is healed. News travels and all kinds of people want healing. But Paul says 'No, I've got to get to Rome!' Of course not. Our goals aren't the goal in life, people are. And then they go on their journey and they stop in Puteoli and they meet some fellow believers there. And they spend a week there! Why? Because Paul is here to serve. Rome will happen but God has people on your way to your goal that need to be served.

And you guess what happens when we stop and serve the people God places in our paths?

They end up serving us (vv.10, 15-16)

Look what the Maltese do for Paul in v.10,

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.

When we serve people to meet their needs, God encourages us and meets our own needs. We don't do it for that reason; God just balances it out somehow. Because we have needs too. That's why when Paul wrote to the Romans about his desire to be with them, he said in Rom. 1:11

¹¹ I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— ¹² that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

And after leaving Puteoli they arrive in Rome, we read in Acts 28:15,

The brothers and sisters 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 people Paul thanked God and was encouraged.

We not only need to serve others who God uses to meet our needs, we do it

Because everyone always need encouragement (v.15b)

Isn't it interesting that when we have an opportunity to get together with other believers, we are often tempted not to go for the lamest of reasons (if we're honest). Why does that happen? Because Satan doesn't want us to be encouraged and grow in our faith. Because if we go and fellowship with other believers and taste and see that the Lord is good, then we just might be more inclined to do it again. And be encouraged again. It takes so little to be discouraged, but it doesn't take much to be encouraged either. And if we're honest Satan often wins that battle too many times.

Why do we let Satan win in our life? Why are we over busy, over tired, and get lazy to encourage others by getting together or even showing up on time to church so you have time to talk to people or saying hi to someone other than your family or same friends? The goal isn't to get here and then go home asap; the goal is people who need to be served and who need to serve us. Some of whom need Jesus too. And that applies to everything we do and everywhere we go.

So Paul finally arrives in Rome. These brothers and sisters come out to meet Paul the way the Romans greet a returning general coming back from victory or an emperor returning from a trip. They leave the city to greet him and march in with him. Now what does he do that he's finally arrived at the center of the world, his lifetime goal?

He reaches out to the Jewish community and says 'Hey guys, have you heard from Jerusalem about how terrible a person I am?' Paul! Are you insane? No, he's not. He wants to see right away if there's going to be similar problems here like there were in Jerusalem. Paul's methodology for reaching people for Christ always starts with the Jewish community. He was a Jew. He grew up in a legalistic environment as most of these have. He grew up rejecting Jesus, etc. So what was Paul always doing that you and I can apply in our own context?

Use Your Opportunities in Your Circumstances to Engage People with the Gospel **(27:16-31)**

Paul is chained but has the freedom to have people come to him. To some degree this is actually safe. If the Jews were as mad at Paul here as those in Jerusalem then Paul is protected. Strangely, however we read in v.21

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."

Most likely when the Jerusalem religious leaders saw that Festus and Agrippa did not feel Paul was guilty of anything, they were reluctant to go to Rome because you don't want to waste the Emperor's time and look foolish. So they dropped it.

But Paul reached out to the Jewish community in faith and I'm pretty sure I can safely say he

Pray for 'open doors' (vv.16-22)

And God gave him an open door to the Jews in Rome where Paul did what we all should do

Declare it "fearlessly as you should" (vv.23-29; Eph. 6:20)

In Col. 4:2 Paul would tell us to pray like this because he prayed this way for himself:

² Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. ³ And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴ Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. ⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Paul prayed for an open door to the Jewish community and used his opportunity (even in chains) to proclaim the gospel clearly as he should. Paul made the most of the opportunities God gave him. That helps us in our efforts to share Christ. Devote yourself to prayer (making sure you are praying for lost people) and watching for opportunities for God to open a door for the message and when the opportunity arises to share Jesus, do it as clearly as you know as you should.

Which is really freeing. Because I will do it differently than you. You will do it differently than me. Paul will do it the way God gifted him. There is no 'one correct way' to do it. You don't have to mimic someone else. Just be who God made you to be. You have the Spirit of Jesus dwelling in you. He will give you words to share. He will use your gifts and personality to share Jesus through the opportunities you have with the people in your sphere of influence or immediate context.

Should we memorize some verses? Sure, that definitely helps. But even if you said God says in the gospel of John that He loves the world that He sent His Son to die for you ... or Paul wrote in Romans that we have all sinned and fall short of God's glory ... those are fine. You can point people to those exact verses if you have the chance. Or if you have something like a tract or booklet to hand them, even better. God saved you and me to be the witnesses of Jesus working in our life to help others know and love Jesus.

Pray for your job that God might open doors to share the gospel. Pray for that group you belong to that there might be opportunities to show and share the love of God. Make a list of people's names if that works for you. Some people write down names of people they pray for regularly. You do what works for you. If you need suggestions how, ask someone for ideas. Just pray and make the most of the opportunities God gives you.

Paul used his situation to first reach out to the local Jews with the gospel. Why? Because he could relate to them. We read a few believed and some didn't in v.21

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:

Which Paul boldly quotes Isaiah where we read that many Jews physically listen but don't spiritually hear and see physically but not spiritually. And Paul says, I tried with you guys but now I'll go to the Gentiles also. Acts ends with this,

³⁰ He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, ³¹ proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Luke intentionally ended Acts with the last word in Greek meant to ring loud and clear - "unhindered". It wasn't Paul that was unhindered; he was in chains. Yet he made the most of his opportunity being under house arrest for two years to write Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. We know he received many visitors; Tychicus was with Paul in Rome and delivered 3 of those letters. Onesimus ran away from his master Philemon, met Paul, got saved and returned back. We know that Timothy, Epaphras, Epaphroditus, Mark, Demas, Luke and Aristarchus all connected with Paul in Rome. Paul summed up his situation well even when he was arrested for the final time 4 years later when he would die,

^{2 Tim. 2:8} Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, ⁹ for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained.

Use God's opportunities to share the gospel through the open doors you pray for and do it in the way in which God designed you

Because the gospel can't be chained (vv.30-31)

We live in a world where in many places – and we're not that far off here – that God's Word is being hindered. Why? Because it's dangerous. It will change people's minds and their life for good. They will learn the truth. They will be freed from their sins. They will find hope in Jesus. They will find new friends who will stick with them in difficulties. They can share in invincible message that no person can hinder.

Yes, the gospel got to the end of the earth for that time but we are still seeking to reach every end of the earth with the gospel. That means our little corners where we can have influences and opportunities in the geographical locations God places us in.

Pray for the unsaved. Pray God would give us opportunities to share His Word. May we do it boldly in the way god designed for us to share and because it can't be stopped. It does work. The gospel is the power of God for Salvation.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
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