



The Unfinished Story

Series: Acts -- Worldwide Witness to the Worth of Jesus Christ

Acts 28

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It is hard to believe that we are actually coming to the close of the book of Acts this morning. Even though we started it a little over a year ago, it seems like just yesterday. Every sermon has been so timely, every text perfectly applicable for the exact moment and exact place that we have been as a church. We have traced the growth of the fledgling church from its humble beginnings in Jerusalem and gone along for the ride as Luke has recorded for us the spread of the flame of the gospel throughout the world through men like Peter and Phillip, Stephen and Paul, in the text today -- all the way to the capital of the world empire in Rome. You guys are good about reading ahead for the sermon and, like me, you may have wondered at the abrupt ending to this incredible story. At least for me, when I read verses 30-31: "He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance." (Acts 28:30–31, ESV) – my first response is, "What happened next?"

It's kind of like the story of the great Italian opera composer, Puccini. In 1922, he was diagnosed with cancer, but even after being stricken with the disease, Puccini was personally determined to write one final opera, "Turandot," believed by some to have been his very best. He labored on it for two years, despite the pleas from his friends and his students to rest and conserve his strength. At one point, when his health was failing badly, he stated confidently, "If I do not finish my music, my students will finish it." Finally he succumbed to cancer in 1924, with his opera incomplete. His students did what he had predicted and went on to finish "Turandot," and in 1926 the premiere was held in Milan under the direction of Puccini's favorite student, Arturo Toscanini. Everything went beautifully until the point in the score where Puccini had been forced by his illness to lay aside his pen. Toscanini, overcome with emotion and openly weeping, stopped everything. Turning to face the audience, he said, "Thus far the master wrote, but he died!" Waiting a few moments to compose himself, his face now beaming with a great smile, Toscanini picked up his baton and said loudly, "But his disciples finished his work!" Then they finished the opera to standing ovations.

The Book of Acts is much like this. At the beginning of the book of Acts, Luke wrote: “In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.” (Acts 1:1–2, ESV) In the gospel of Luke, Luke described the ministry of Jesus, all that Jesus began to do and to teach, and the command Christ gave to his apostles to finish the work. In Luke’s second book, Acts, comes the account of that completion of the work by his disciples. The work that Jesus began was to be completed by His disciples, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”” (Acts 1:8, ESV) Now, here’s the thing. In one sense, the work of spreading the gospel and witnessing to the worth of Christ was complete -- Luke leaves us with the apostle Paul preaching the gospel in the capital of the known world. And yet in another sense, Luke leaves the story open and on-going because it is. This story is still being written in heaven. Jesus’ disciples have been carrying on the mission of witnessing to the worth of Jesus Christ throughout the world for over 2,000 years. We stand in that long line of witnesses, chosen of God, both to be saved and also to proclaim the eternal worth of the Christ, so that one day in heaven there might be a glorious gathering of some from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, whom Jesus purchased for God with His blood, the reward of Christ’s sufferings. This story does not end, will not end, until the day that Christ returns and all of His people are gathered to Him for all of eternity. Keep that in mind as we wind down in the Book of Acts this morning. The reason it ends as it does is because the story is not over and we must all take our place in the story until the day of Christ’s glorious appearing. So let’s look at this last chapter, as Paul finally makes it to Rome.

“After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold.” (Acts 28:1–2, ESV) After Paul and the rest of ship’s passengers, 276 in all, survived the hurricane and the shipwreck, by God’s grace, and they came ashore at Malta, a small island about 18 miles long and 8 miles wide. They still weren’t out of the woods yet. Hypothermia was a very real concern, especially since it was cold and it had begun to rain once more. And yet again, as we have already seen so many times, we see the providential hand of God in what happens. The natives, actually the word here is “barbarians” – that’s how Romans would have perceived these people who could not speak Greek – proved to be anything but barbarians and immediately showed great kindness and hospitality by starting a fire and giving shelter and food to these waterlogged men. Then something crazy happens.

“When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, “No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live.” He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm.” (Acts 28:3–5, ESV) Notice this. Though he is himself in need of ministry and care, we immediately see Paul gathering together sticks to keep the fire going, taking care of the needs of the men who were with him, leading by example, sacrificing for the good of the whole. It just so happened, that while he was gathering sticks and putting them on the fire a viper, probably stiff with cold and easily mistaken for a stick in the bundle that Paul was applying to the fire, suddenly came to life and bit him on the hand. Casually, Paul just shook the snake off into the fire and went about his business. He doesn’t freak out. I would have... He just takes it in stride.

It wasn’t nearly so casual for the natives, however. They saw this bite from a poisonous serpent as a judgment of the gods, specifically of the goddess, Dike, the goddess of justice – that’s why the word “Justice” is capitalized here. They thought that Paul must be a murderer and that’s why the snake bit him. Justice was not going to let Paul escape his fate. Of course they were wrong in their assessment, but we have come to expect that when it comes to Paul. It seems like Paul was always the victim of incorrect assumptions and faulty judgments, no matter where he went, even on the island of Malta.

“They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.” (Acts 28:6, ESV) This is just ridiculous. They are all waiting for something to happen to Paul, for his hand to swell up or for him to kick the bucket, but nothing happens. Nothing at all. Here we see fallen human wisdom at its finest. If he isn’t a murderer then he must be a god. Well, of course, that’s the next logical assumption, right? What a revealing picture of the fickle nature of men and women – either Paul’s a murderer or a god – got to be one of the two, no other options. If it weren’t so blasphemous, you know Paul would have been laughing. As it is, though, he had to be shaking his head. Anyway, because he doesn’t die, Paul must have come to the attention of the Roman representative at Malta, a man named Publius.

“Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days.” (Acts 28:7, ESV) Publius must have been a pretty rich guy, because he was able to receive and provide for 276

people for three days. That's no small feat. While they were there, Publius apparently took the opportunity to tell them about his father who was ill.

"It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him healed him." (Acts 28:8, ESV) He had what was known as "Malta fever" which was caused by a certain kind of bacteria that was found in the milk of Maltese goats. The sickness was pretty severe and left untreated it would lead to death. Paul determined to intervene. I do want you to notice the progression of events, though, because they are significant. Paul doesn't just walk into the man's house and immediately heal him. Instead we read that he prayed. Why? I believe that he was praying to discern if it was God's will to heal this man. He doesn't just assume, but awaits the leading of the Holy Spirit before laying hands on Publius' father and healing him by the power of God. Paul is still a man under authority and his chief authority is the Lord. He doesn't just use his apostolic gifts in any way he wants. He waits on the leading of the Lord.

Well, not only was Publius' father made well, but the news of his healing got around. "And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured." (Acts 28:9, ESV) The power of God came to Malta through the obedient and merciful ministry of Paul. Luke doesn't go into detail about what other ministry Paul may have done, but we know that they were on the island for 3 months and Paul was not a man to sit on his hands. We would be right to assume that this healing ministry likely resulted in the proclamation of the gospel and the salvation of some of these islanders. Luke doesn't go into details regarding what Paul may have preached, nor does he give us a "ministry report" of the souls won, as if that could be quantified anyway. The important thing is that God was at work here. That much is clear. And where God is at work, the results are assured. In fact, Luke tells us of the gratitude of at least some of the island natives in verse 10.

"They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed." (Acts 28:10, ESV) Once again, we see the whole group blessed for the sake of Paul. Finally ready to leave Malta and get to Rome, Luke gives us what amounts to a ship's log in the next few verses.

"After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang

up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli.” (Acts 28:11–13, ESV) Just one thing I want to point out here. The ship they took had for its figurehead the twins, Castor and Pollux, whom the mythical god Zeus supposedly transformed into gods represented by the constellation Gemini. Sailors considered those two a sign of good luck in a storm and apparently these superstitious sailors didn’t want to take any chances after all they had been through. Their route took them from Malta to Syracuse, Sicily’s major port city, on its southeastern coast. Here, they stayed for three days, before sailing on to Rhegium, a port on the toe of the “boot” of Italy. When a south wind sprang up on the following day, they sailed on to the prominent port city of Puteoli, the port for Rome. While in Puteoli, they had a pleasant surprise:

“There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome.” (Acts 28:14, ESV) We are not told how exactly they found these brothers, but for a whole week they were able to rest and enjoy the fellowship of other believers. Neither do we know the reason for the seven-day wait, but finally Paul made his way to Rome – a 37-mile hike, but he and his small party were not alone. Luke tells us: “And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage.” (Acts 28:15, ESV) Remember that the church in Rome had received Paul’s Epistle to the Romans some time ago, an amazingly rich letter, one that explained the scope of God’s redemptive plan, the fullness of gospel of grace in Christ, and all of its implications to a greater degree than any other NT book. So when the Roman Christians heard that he was arriving in Rome, people from Appius – 43 miles away -- and Three Taverns – 33 mile away, came to see and walk with Paul, to encourage him and to talk with him on the way. The other prisoners had to be shocked. This couldn’t have been what they had expected. Here is Paul showing up in Rome, as a prisoner remember, and he is being hailed as sort of a hero or something; people are coming out from everywhere to see him and walk with him. It had to be a curious sight, Paul in chains on his way to see the Emperor and the people flocking around him along the way.

What it did was stir Paul’s soul – he thanked God and took courage. He was grateful to God and it bolstered his faith to be greeted by brothers and sisters in Christ. Although he had been visited by Christ himself as we saw in chapter 23, as well as an angel who comforted and assured him that he would make it to Rome while on the ship in the midst of the storm, and though all those promises of God are absolutely true, Paul still found great comfort in this human outpouring of support and love. There is great strength to be found in the encouragement and love of fellow followers of Christ. That’s why the writer of Hebrews speaks of how important it is for the people of God to gather together in worship, saying: “Let us hold

fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:23–25, ESV) Look around this sanctuary this morning. God has given to us Christ, the greatest need of our souls, and He has also given us to one another to encourage each other to press on, in the good times and in the bad, and this was encouragement that Paul greatly needed for the task that awaited him in Rome.

Luke tells us what happened when he got there: “And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.” (Acts 28:16, ESV) By another stroke of the providence of God, Paul was not placed in the Mamertine Prison in Rome – a horrible place – but rather, was allowed to stay in a house that he had to provide at his own expense, but which would also allow him to be able to receive his friends and to teach the gospel, though at all times being chained by the wrist a soldier. Six soldiers would each take four-hour shifts guarding Paul. Guard duty was not exactly fun because they would have been restricted to Paul’s activities and his company – and you can imagine what Paul would be doing with his “captive audience” – testifying to the gospel of Jesus Christ and proclaiming salvation in Him alone. The truth is that there were no more blessed guards in history – having the indescribable privilege of being chained to the greatest preacher of the gospel who ever lived. And as we see, Paul didn’t waste any time.

“After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, “Brothers, though I had 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. When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar—though I had no charge to bring against my nation. For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain.” And they said to him, “We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against.”” (Acts 28:17–22, ESV) Look what Paul does here. Here takes the bull by the horns, so to speak, and he calls for the local Jewish leaders to come and meet with him at his house and he wastes no time in clearing the air. He tells them a Cliff Notes version of everything that had happened to him – the attacks of the Jews in Jerusalem for his preaching of the gospel that led to his imprisonment. He assures them first that he had done nothing

against the Jews, whom he calls “our people,” nor did he speak or act against what he calls “the customs of our fathers.” He had done nothing to warrant their hateful treatment of him at all. Even when he was turned over to the Romans, when they examined him they wanted to set Paul free. Though he had no complaint against the Jews, still he felt compelled to appeal his case to Caesar because he was concerned for his life – and because he wanted to preach the gospel in Rome.

In fact, Paul says, the only reason that he is in chains is because he believed in the “hope of Israel.” The Jews hated Paul because he believed in what all the Jews should believe in. What was the “hope of Israel?” The true hope of Israel was that God would send to her a Messiah, a King, and a Savior, who would take away the sins of God’s people and reconcile them to God. The primary sign of this Messiah would be that he would bear their sins, and die in their place paying the price of their rebellion against God, and then rise physically from the dead in three days to give them forgiveness of sins – the sign of Jonah. And that this Messiah would be the “salvation that (God has) prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” (Luke 2:30–32, ESV)

The response from the Jewish leaders is kind of curious isn’t it? “We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against.” It’s very hard to believe that they had not heard about Paul, that no one had spoken to them about the upheaval in Jerusalem surrounding him as a result of the gospel. Probably what they meant is that while they had received no formal charges against Paul, they were aware of the gospel and its impact – the sect as they called it, the heresy -- and at best they were skeptical. Still they were willing to hear what Paul had to say, as opposed to the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem that just wanted him dead. So they set a date when they would come and hear more from Paul.

“When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.” (Acts 28:23, ESV) This one verse is so rich. Just look at the verbs that Luke uses to describe the way that Paul preaches – this is real preaching. He expounded – he explained, stacking up truth upon truth. He testified – he bore passionate witness as a man who had been changed by the gospel. He

tried to convince them – he made every effort to persuade them of the truth and to act on it by placing their faith in Christ. This is real preaching.

Notice something else; this was no short little sermonette, no quick, twenty-minute presentation. He preached all day into the evening. I hope the Jews brought a Snickers. And everything that he did, was rooted in preaching the Word of God, the OT. He doesn't work miracles. He doesn't speak in tongues. He doesn't utter a word of prophecy. He quotes a prophecy, but he doesn't utter a prophecy. He doesn't do what he did on the island of Malta and heal a bunch of people. All he does is take the Bible...he takes the Old Testament Scriptures, the Bible of the Jews...and he expounds and opens up and comments upon, and draws out from what is in the word of God, the truth about Christ. That's all that is necessary -- "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness," (2 Timothy 3:16, ESV) Like Peter, Paul know that men and women are "born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;" (1 Peter 1:23, ESV) It wasn't innovative or "cutting edge," not epic or extreme – none of the buzzwords of many modern churches and pastors grown bored with the gospel or unconvinced of the power of God's truth.

He just preached the Word of God, and particularly the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God, the reign of God in the hearts of men, is what the OT is all about. It's all about the rule and reign of God. It's all about God's plan to save a people for Himself, through the gift of the seed of the woman – Jesus -- who will crush the head of Satan – which He did through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. That's the message of the Old Testament Scriptures. It's about the King. It's about God's rule. It's about God's reign through Jesus Christ as the only Savior of sinners, the Messiah of Israel, the King of creation. It is all about God's plan to deal with the sins of His people once and for all and Christ's reign over them as the Savior King who blesses His people with eternal life and never ending joy. All that is required to enter this kingdom is that we believe that through Christ we can be made at peace with God and turn away from our sinful desires and humble ourselves before Him as Lord and God. That is the center and core of the Old Testament Scriptures and the continuing testimony of the NT. And the response is as we have always seen it to be, the way we see it to be in our day.

"And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved." (Acts 28:24, ESV) Some believed in Christ, some received Jesus as Lord, Savior and King. They believed Paul's words and came to know the joy of forgiveness of sins and peace with God. And others disbelieved, that is

they refused to believe the simple and obvious truth, no matter how it was presented. This is the story of the spread of the gospel in Acts. This is the story of the gospel in our own day. It is a story with two sides. On one hand there are those who gladly receive the truth, who receive new life and salvation in Christ. And on the other hand there are those who simply refuse to believe and who respond to the offer of eternal life in Christ with hostility, scorn, indifference, or passive rejection. But there is always a response to the preaching of Jesus Christ as Lord.

Paul talked about it in his second letter to the Corinthians: “But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.” (2 Corinthians 2:14–17, ESV) Paul was speaking here of his experience as a preacher of the gospel, as a faithful preacher of the Word of God and the consequences that the faithful preaching of the word of God brings with it. Every time the preacher faithfully preaches the gospel, it is a triumphant act, declaring the glory of Christ. Every time the Word goes forth, it accomplishes its purpose for which it was sent – sometimes that purpose is salvation, other times it is judgment.

The gospel is a powerful and strong truth -- a saving, sanctifying, encouraging, life-giving, grace bestowing message for those who receive it. But for those who reject it, it is the condemnation and judgment of hell. Every proclamation of the gospel by the preacher either draws souls toward eternal life in Christ, or toward holiness and submission to Jesus as Lord or confirms them in sin and rebellion toward Christ. It softens hearts or it hardens them. It brings men the forgiveness of sins in Jesus, or it will justify God in consigning them hell. But in either response, God is glorified. When men and women hear the gospel and respond in repentance and faith and are saved, God’s grace is magnified and God is glorified. And when men and women hear the gospel and reject it and are judged, God’s holiness is upheld and God is glorified. When you hear the gospel preached it is always active. It is either doing the gracious work of drawing you to Christ and exalting Him in your heart, or it is doing the terrible work of condemning you in your sin – all according to the way that you receive it.

Some of these Jews rejected the truth, refused to believe and the meeting came to a screeching halt as Luke tells us: “And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made

one statement: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: “ ‘Go to this people, and say, “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’ Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”” (Acts 28:25–28, ESV) It may not be immediately obvious what Paul was saying and doing here, so let me explain. When Paul quotes from the Prophet Isaiah, he is announcing God’s judgment on them for refusing to believe the truth. The Jews were a people who had been rescued from bondage in Egypt, brought into a covenant relationship with God to be His people and the true God, their God. They had been given the truth of the OT scriptures, heard the faithful testimony of the gospel of Christ and still they refused to believe. And here, what Paul is announcing is the judgment of God, the judicial hardening of their hearts to the truth.

Some people think this isn’t fair. Why would God close ears and blind eyes and then punish them for not hearing and seeing? He does so – and here is the key – because the closing of the ears and of the eyes is God’s judgment on people who did not want to hear and did not want to see the truth to begin with. This is what God does. In His judgment, in Rev. 22, He says: “Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.” “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.” (Revelation 22:11–17, ESV) The way of life is open but if you hear the word again and again and it continues to fall on a hard, unbelieving, rejecting heart, God will eventually give you over to that heart forever. He says, “Come,” but if you won’t you will be confirmed in your rejection once and for all. That is what Paul is saying here.

And last, he is saying, if you don’t want the Word of God, the salvation that God offers in Christ – He will take it elsewhere. Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.

The book then comes to a close with this picture. “He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.” (Acts 28:30–31, ESV) After this meeting with the Jews, Paul lived under house arrest in Rome for the next two years. And the picture we get is of a home with a revolving door – people coming from all over to hear the Word of God, to hear him teaching about Jesus Christ and Paul at his bold best – freely proclaiming the truth with no hindrance to his preaching at all.

Now, like I said before, Luke leaves us here with a cliffhanger of sorts. I mean, what happens after this? We all want to know. We want to know because we have grown to love Paul. Where does he go from here? From various historical accounts, we know that Nero eventually set Paul free when there were no charges to hold him. Paul continued in his apostolic ministry for two or three more years, some people believing that he eventually made it to Spain. For certain, he ministered to some of the churches that he had planted in Asia. IN AD 64, however, things took a turn for the worse. The Roman emperor, Nero, set fire to Rome, in order to push forward a building project that had been opposed by the Roman senate. Burn down the city and you have to rebuild, right? Needing someone to blame, Nero chose the Christians. Nero, though he started well, by this time, was a madman and had an irrational hatred of all Christians and it was in this time that Paul was arrested again, brought to Rome, and was publically executed – beheaded for his faithfulness to Christ.

But, Luke doesn’t tell us all of that. He ends Acts with Paul preaching and you know why? Because this story is not about Paul, or Peter, or Stephen, or Phillip, or any of the men whom we have read about in this book – not ultimately. The story is about Jesus. That is the point of Scripture and it is the central theme of creation. It is not primarily about us, but Christ. That’s what Acts is about. It is about Jesus, the Son of God who came into this dying, sin-filled world. He lived a perfectly righteous life obedient to God’s Law, never sinning. He suffered and was put to death, taking on God’s Wrath for our sins – standing in our place, paying the penalty we all deserve – so that we could be forgiven by God and given His righteousness to enter into the presence of God. All of this to be received by faith in Him. Jesus physically rose from the dead, ascended back to the throne of the Son at the right hand of the Father, where He now reigns sovereign over all of Creation. And Jesus will come again – to judge the living and the dead, and to bring in the new heavens and the new earth – where all those who believe in Jesus alone for salvation will live with Him for all of eternity. And all of this is so that He will receive the glory and the praise that He deserves and we will receive the glorious eternal blessing that we don’t deserve, eternal life– all to the praise of His glory forever.

It is this gospel that is the hope for us individually, for our families, and for the world. This book ends as it does because the story is not over...not yet, and it will not be until Christ returns in glory. There are still people out there who need to believe in Christ, some of you in this room today. And believers, we have a gospel to live for. And so I am encouraging you beloved, to live for what is worth living for – for Christ, for his glory, for the sake of the gospel. We all love the stories of men who sacrifice and live significant lives for something greater than themselves. What is greater than the gospel? Who is greater than Christ?

We don't have to be extreme or epic. Let's just do the old-fashioned but proven things – believe the gospel of Christ, know and love Jesus, get to know people, preach to them the Word of God, call them to faith, anchor them in the Scriptures, so that they might bear the word of Christ to others, and watch as God works through the most normal of means to bring about the most extraordinary of outcomes: salvation, eternal life, all things becoming new, Christ's glory spreading through the world.

It's not easy. God knows that. We see all throughout the book of Acts that living for God is not easy, but it is real living. If we would live for Christ, our lives will be much like the men that we read about in this book. There will be that strange mixture of light and darkness, power and weakness, victory and defeat, troubles and blessings – but true forgiveness, truly abundant life in Christ. This is all part of living a life in the “already, but not yet” of Christ's Kingdom. Already, He reigns over all, but not in the way that it will be when all opposition to Him and to His kingdom is finally and fully defeated. And part of living for Christ is to keep our present and the future in firm tension, seeing both rightly.

When our eyes get fixed on the present we begin to think and act as if this is all the life that will ever be. We struggle with discouragement, get sucked into worldliness; get frustrated with the unfairness of it all, that the evil around us that seems to go on unchecked, the slide of our culture into the abyss. We find can find ourselves relaxing our standards for our living because we grow used to the sin around us and because we are “under grace” and God will “understand” if we compromise just a little so we can get “the good things” that this life has to offer, that those who do not live for Christ seem to have in abundance – whatever that may be – living for the moment. On the other hand, when our focus is exclusively on heaven to come, we grow careless of our living here for the opposite reason -- we start to think that our witness won't make a difference. We start to resent sinners and hate them really, not wanting to see them rescued from the wrath to come, and we withdraw from them because we just don't

believe that God can really change people now and save people now, and we withdraw from living in this world.

But this tension is exactly what living for Christ is about. Living excellently and faithfully in the present, doing everything that we do by faith – being a husband or wife, a parent, a friend, whatever job we have, coaching, volunteering, serving, loving, earning a paycheck, investing our lives in other people – living all of life as a testimony to Christ, all the while trusting in God to use us through the gospel to make a real difference in this world now, no matter the cost or the hardship, and still looking the return of Jesus in glory. Believing, serving, striving, for the sake of Christ and the people around us but with eyes firmly planted on the day when we see Jesus face-to-face. That is how Paul lived, how all of the great saints of old lived -- sure, at every moment, both that the God who made the heavens and the earth is accomplishing His will in this world through His people and bringing salvation and transformation to sinners' lives and that the day is coming very soon when this world and all that is in it shall pass away and God's people shall be with him face to face, in glory and be with Him forever. Luke ends this story the way that he does because the story is not finished and we need to take our place in it.

The message of Acts is clear, and it is one that we need to remind ourselves of continually – Christ is worthy and the calling that is before us all is for us is to live like we believe that with all of our hearts.

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