

60—Acts 28.17-31—An Unexpected Ending

- I. Introduction
 - a. That's it? That's how Luke finishes the story? But what about Paul? We want to know how our hero fares, right? We want to see him stand before the great Caesar and win finally see the case dismissed. We want to hear how Paul weaves the gospel into his defense. We want justice! But we do not get any of the answers we long for at the end.
 - b. Unless that was not the point of this book all along. It's as if Luke ended with many more chapters to write. And if you have eyes to see, that's the most fitting ending of all.
 - c. We've seen the risen Lord Jesus reign from heaven over the affairs of this world and accomplish his mission to make the gospel known to the ends of the earth.
 - d. Acts ends in what we might call these days, a global city. The estimates of the population of the Roman Empire at the beginning of the first century was 5-6 Million. The population of Rome at that same time was around a million.
 - e. Indeed, density of population has been on the minds of missionaries for years. Places like Tokyo, Japan who have a population of 37,274,000. To put that into perspective, the current population of the US is about 330,000,000. Only one city in the US is in the top fifty of most populated cities which is New York at number 41 with 8.9 million.
 - f. The world population is nearing the 8 billion mark. The mission of God isn't over. The story of the Acts of the risen Lord Jesus continue on.
- II. Main Point
 - a. The risen Lord Jesus continues to advance the mission of making the gospel known and the story does not end with Paul. He's not the point. And neither are we. The Triune God is! The mission is not done.
- III. Outline
 - a. Paul's First Meeting with the Chiefs of the Jews in Rome
 - b. Proclaiming the Gospel to the Chiefs of the Jews in Rome
 - c. Proclaiming the Gospel to all with all boldness and without hinderance
- IV. Exposition
 - a. As we come to the end of Luke's story, there scrolls across the screen "to be continued." But before we get there, let's take note of how Paul quickly reaches out to the Jews and seeks to make known the reason he's in Rome. Let's see how this first encounter goes with the Jews.
 - i. This is the first meeting of two with the leaders of the Jews in Rome.
 1. Additionally, Paul followed the same pattern as before when he arrived in a new city.
 - a. (Rom. 1:14-16) ¹⁴ I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. ¹⁵ So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. ¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
 - b. Whether he lands on Malta among barbarians or Rome among Greeks or the great minds of Athens or the slave Onesimus, Paul seeks to make the gospel known.
 - c. He believes and we believe it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.
 - d. But he seeks to gather with the leading Jews in Rome to discuss his imprisonment.
 - i. What does it look like for a man who's been through what Paul has? Is this meeting to seek a way out of prison?

1. Here's what he wrote to the church in Colossae concerning what he was headed to do in Rome--(Col. 4:2-4) ² Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison-- ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.
2. His imprisonment was because of the gospel. He could not separate those things.
2. Again, his explanation makes clear that he is not Anti-Jew.
 - a. He calls them brothers there in v. 17. Indeed, these are his kindred and he longs for them to believe the gospel (Rom. 10:1).
 - b. He states that he had done nothing against our people or the customs or our fathers there in verse 17.
 - c. We do not hear the charge repeated. We've heard it several times at this point. He must have explained it in detail or they would not have made the connection there in verse 22 that Paul is part of "this sect" that believes the Messiah has come, died on a cross, and been raised from the dead.
3. The next part of his explanation affirms his innocence when he was handed over to the Romans.
 - a. As we've already seen, their examination of him found no fault.
 - b. Paul is right to say they did not find anything deserving of death as the leaders of Jerusalem demanded.
 - c. However, the Jews rejected that decision which forced Paul to appeal to Caesar.
 - i. There's an interesting side of this appeal that we haven't thought about.
 - ii. There at the end of verse 19, Paul does not bring any charge against his nation.
 1. It seems Paul had a better case than the leaders of Jerusalem. In fact, if Paul had countered, this could have proved extremely dangerous for all Jewish people in the empire.
 2. Paul doesn't wish them harm nor to make it harder for them to believe.
 3. We will often forgo rights we may have as citizens of the state out of love and mercy towards them.
4. But these Jews sit listening to Paul while he sits in custody with a Roman guard and chains.
 - a. Those are hard to overcome. Those three things carry a lot of weight. They are the silent witnesses in the room.
 - b. But Paul declares that he's there in chains because of the hope of Israel.
 - i. You might expect them to say, "Yeah, right." What about the chains?
 - ii. However, the response of the Jewish leaders isn't like that.
 1. They tell Paul there in verse 21 that they had not received any letters from Judea about him and none of the brothers coming here had reported any evil about Paul.
 - a. This says a lot about Paul's innocence. And it says a lot about these men to rest their opinions on evidence.

2. Also, at some point they must come and make their case against Paul before Caesar. There's no record that ever happened.
 - a. No letters and no witnesses.
 3. Scholars have wrestled with exactly what happened here.
 - a. We all want to know what happened to Paul.
 - b. However, for two years there seems to be no trial.
 - c. Some think the Jews never came and the statute of limitation ran out and Paul was freed.
 - d. We simply do not know.
 - c. These Jewish leaders express a desire to hear what Paul thinks about Jesus and those who follow him.
 - i. No...they do not call it that. But obviously, Paul has made it clear in this first meeting that the hope of Israel rests in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 - ii. Notice the reason they want to hear Paul's views.
 1. There in (Acts 28:22) ...for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere."
 2. In other words, they call "the Way" or the church a sect.
 - a. The Jews had sects within Judaism. The Pharisees were the strictest sect among them.
 - b. However, the word is also used as a separatist group and by that they mean heretical cult.
 - iii. As I have stated multiple times, Paul was saying...no...this isn't a separate religion but rather the fulfillment of Israel's hope.
 1. This is the continuation of God's promised redemption through his promised Messiah.
 - d. The first meeting comes to an end with plans to hear what Paul thinks about this sect which Paul calls in the next meeting, the Kingdom of God.
- ii. How do you respond to this? What are we to think?
 1. But I want to ask, can the church grow and the gospel continue to spread in such an environment?
 - a. The answer is yes. It always has. The story of Acts answers that affirmatively.
 - b. The numbers may seem few these days. The church is in decline in America. That's not true globally. But we live here.
 - i. And yet, suffering at the hands of the world speaking against the church will remain normal until the end comes.
 - ii. Our faithful Lord will see our souls safely to the end.
- b. As we move on in the story, the next meeting comes about. This time, it's focus is not on the judicial case but on the case for Christ.
 - i. I suspect we would have been tempted to tag this conversation on with the previous one. However, the plans were made to come back with an unhindered focus on what is this sect and what does Paul think about Jesus and the resurrection. How is Jesus the hope of Israel?
 - ii. If you notice there in verse 23, they came together on the appointed day to hear Paul.
 1. This meeting had to take place in Paul's place of lodging. He wasn't free to travel about as he awaited trial. But he was allowed to have guests.
 2. And many came. In fact, it says "great numbers" there in the middle of v. 23.
 3. The meeting was very long—from morning to evening.

- a. Paul did not pull a copy of the many letters he had written but rather he expounded the Law of Moses and the Prophets.
 - i. In them, Paul sought to connect the dots and convince them about Jesus.
 - ii. That's right, he preached Jesus from the OT.
 - 1. That means, Paul is NOT anti-Jew. He opens God's word and shows them to whom it all pointed—Jesus.
 - a. From the child of Gen. 3:15 who would crush the head of the serpent, the Son of Abraham, the King of Judah, the lamb of the Passover, the sacrifices of the old covenant, the prophet like Moses, the Son of David, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, and on and on.
 - b. I'm reading Chronicles right now. They were the books the Hebrew Bible ended with. The conclusion you must make at the end is...the Messiah who will obey the Lord and build God's house had not come.
 - c. But then Jesus is born. And before long, we see that he fulfills all the promises God had made concerning the Messiah.
 - iii. As I've thought about this, it seems we've reduced evangelism down to saying very little. However, to unpack the gospel, one needs time and space to do so.
 - 1. Not only have we employed an edited gospel but we've used pressure and manipulation. We've used emotional appeals that have little to no understanding of the gospel.
 - a. Indeed, the gospel is a message to be proclaimed but it is a message to be explained. Do they understand who Jesus is and what it means to repent and trust in the Christ?
 - b. The demands of the gospel must be made clear.
 - iv. After working through the OT promises and connections, the large group is divided.
 - 1. Some were convinced by what Paul had said.
 - 2. But others did not believe.
 - a. The gospel is divisive. We naturally do not like to talk about divisive things. Although some people do. And probably without question, those who do talk about that divisive thing, love it very much.
 - i. This is true of the gospel. We love the gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation.
 - ii. It is the good news that sinners like us can be and will be saved from the righteous judgment of God.
 - iii. We believe the rest of the world needs Jesus too.
 - 1. I've been thinking about something. As I think about where you might be in your journey of faith, I wonder if you might be a Ten Commandment keeper who thinks you're doing pretty good with those and that should be good enough.
 - a. I mean, there's nothing explicitly telling me to share this divisive gospel with others. There's no command in those Ten to make disciples of all nations.
 - b. No talk of believing and trusting in Jesus.
 - c. I'm doing pretty good with those Ten.

- d. As I was reading the Gospel of Luke this week, this issue came up. There was a lawyer who thought loving the Lord with all his heart and loving his neighbor was sufficient to be right with God.
 - i. If you're not aware, the Ten Commandments have been described as two sections. Loving God and loving neighbor. The commandments fall under one of those two categories.
 - ii. But the lawyer in Luke asked Jesus a question about loving his neighbor. In fact, it said that he wanted to justify himself.
 - iii. He asked, "Who is my neighbor?"
 - iv. Jesus responds with the story of the Good Samaritan. The priest and Levite bypassed the man nearly beat to death.
 - v. Asking "who is my neighbor" reveals a lot about their love of their neighbor.
 - vi. To withhold the greatest news in the history of the world from anyone doesn't seem like love.
- e. It appears that people can be very religious and say they love God and love their neighbor without loving them at all.
- v. I think this ties in well with what happens next in the story. Though they were divided, some believing and others disbelieving, Paul's next statement ends the discussion.
 - 1. There in beginning in verse 25, Paul quotes Isaiah. Jesus has quoted the same text from Isaiah in a similar situation.
 - a. Here, Paul makes a break with the stubborn forefathers when he now says, "your fathers."
 - i. The implication is "Like fathers, like children." (Peterson 715)
 - b. (Acts 28:25-27) "The Holy Spirit was right in saying (timeless truth from God himself) to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: ²⁶ "Go to this people, and say, "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." ²⁷ 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.'
 - c. Jesus describing the purpose of parables in (Matt. 13:13-14).
 - d. But what is going on here?
 - i. They do not hear BECAUSE their heart's had grown dull. They close their eyes.
 - ii. We watched the Nuremberg trials yesterday. Four German judges were on trial for their hand in the holocaust. At the end, all were sentenced to life in prison by the tribunal but one of the judges wanted to speak with one of the acting judges against him.
 - 1. He said, "We never thought it would come to this."
 - 2. To which the judge replied, "It came to that when you sentenced that first case and went against justice."

- a. It was a wrongful case between a German man and a Jewish woman. They were thought to be in a relationship together. The man was sentenced to death.
 - b. That one step led to the hardest of hearts among some of the best of people.
 - iii. These people reject the obvious and they cannot see apart from the work of grace.
 - iv. To come to God through Christ is to come in humility and repentance are required.
 - 1. You can't have Jesus without them.
 - 2. You must reorient your thinking and behavior towards God.
 - 3. Ironically, it will not happen with many of these Jewish leaders.
 - v. But it will happen among the Gentiles as Paul concludes: ²⁸ Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."
- c. The story ends without answers about Paul. But he's not the main character of this story. The risen Lord Jesus is.
 - i. We see that for two years Paul welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - 1. The message throughout Acts has been delivered with boldness—freedom. And it ends with the word—without hindrance.
 - ii. The story goes on...to be continued until Jesus returns.
 - iii. The risen Lord Jesus is still sending his messengers and protecting them through the trials and sufferings.
 - iv. It's sort of funny that Paul doesn't bring any of the journey up in that last meeting with the Jews. His message was the gospel.
 - v. But we saw the journey, didn't we? Do you believe the Lord Jesus will take care of his witness? Do you believe he will bring you safely to the shore of heaven?

V. Response

- a. For the unbelieving among us, you have seen the journey and you have heard the story. Either you see Jesus as your only hope and treasure of greatest prize or you see nothing of any value to give your life to.
- b. Turn from you sin and trust in Jesus. He will forgive you of your sins and count you righteous by faith alone. Will you receive the gift of salvation? Will you bow the knee to King Jesus?
- c. And dear Christians, will you make Jesus known? Imagine the scene in Nehemiah when they are building the wall. Each family was to work on the wall in front of their house.
 - i. In other words, will you take responsibility to share with the network of people God has given to you?
 - ii. With VBS around the corner, have you exhausted your efforts to invite the people in your network?
 - iii. Will you work harder than anyone else? How can you do this? By grace!
 - 1. (1 Cor. 15:10) ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.
 - 2. You have the same grace, do you not?