ACTS

UNSTOPPABLE SPREAD OF AN UNSHAKEABLE FAITH

PART 4

A Study of Acts
Part 4

A companion to *Exalting Jesus in Acts*, by Dr. Tony Merida

Table of Contents

Lesson 34: Encouraging One Another (Acts 20:1-12) 5

Lesson 35: Caring for the Blood-Bought Church of God (Acts 20:13-38) 13

Lesson 36: Paul's Journey to Jerusalem (Acts 20:36-21:16) 19

Lesson 37: Paul in Jerusalem, Part 1a (Acts 21:17-36) 27

Lesson 38: Paul in Jerusalem, Part 1b (Acts 21:37-22:21) 33

Lesson 39: Paul in Jerusalem, Part 2 (Acts 22:22-23:11) 41

Lesson 40: Paul in Caesarea, Part 1 (Acts 23:12-24:27) 49

Lesson 41: Paul in Caesarea, Part 2a (Acts 25:1-27) 59

Lesson 42: Paul in Caesarea, Part 2b (Acts 26:1-32) 65

Lesson 43: Rome at Last!, Part 1 (Acts 27:1-44) 73

Lesson 44: Rome at Last!, Part 2 (Acts 28:1-16) 83

Lesson 45: The End of the Beginning (Acts 28:17-31) 91

Appendix: Answer Guide 99

Bibliography 103

Lesson 34 (10-2-22):
Encouraging One Another (Acts 20:1-12)

After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said
farewell and departed for Macedonia. **2** When he had gone through those regions and had given
them much encouragement, he came to Greece. **3** There he spent three months, and when a
plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to
return through Macedonia. **4** Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the
Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians,
Tychicus and Trophimus. **5** These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, **6** but we
sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them
at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked
with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.
8 There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. **9** And a young man
named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And
being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. **10** But Paul
went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life
is in him." **11** And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with
them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. **12** And they took the youth away alive, and
were not a little comforted.

- Acts 20:1-12 ESV

Throughout the book of Acts, Luke provides chronological details about Paul's missionary journeys. The beginning of Acts 20 is one example: "After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and after encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia" (**v 1**). Luke records real history as it unfolds. He records the sovereign plan and providence of God in the expansion of the gospel through the apostle Paul.

Ephesus is in Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey. Luke notes that Paul traveled "through those regions" (**20:2**), meaning that Paul traveled by land from Ephesus through Macedonia to get to Greece. Paul could have simply taken a ship across the Aegean Sea, but instead, he chose to travel by land so that he could visit the believers along the way. Paul utilized his travels to encourage the churches throughout the Roman Empire.[1]

[1] R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Acts 13–28 for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2019), 105.

This passage is famous for the story of Eutychus falling asleep during Paul's sermon. The young man, whose name means "lucky" or "fortunate," was *unfortunately* sitting by a window when he nodded off as Paul spoke. After his deadly three-story fall, God restored his life, and Paul continued preaching until daybreak.

The story is humorous because many of us can identify with the slow drift toward sleep that can overtake us during a lecture, sermon, or film. My good friend David Platt once fell asleep during *prayer* time at our mentor's house! This poor brother, a committed disciple maker, had worked himself to the point of exhaustion and just couldn't stay awake. Our spirit is often willing, but our flesh is weak. Such weakness reminds us that God alone is self-sufficient and doesn't need sleep (cf. Ps 121:4).

But this story in Acts 20 isn't mainly about how to stay awake during corporate worship. This section of Scripture opens and closes with the concept of *encouragement* in verses 1 and 12, though most versions have "comforted" in verse 12. Luke uses the same basic term (*parakaleo¯*; cf. "Counselor" in John 14:16) three times in this section (vv. 1, 2, 12). It appears numerous times in the New Testament, showing the importance of encouraging others in the mission. Here, in a Christlike and Spirit-like way, Paul comes alongside the saints in various places, strengthening them in word and deed…

Knowing the reality of the spiritual war and the need to fan the flame of Christians' passion for the King, Paul makes several trips to build up the believers. This indicates to me that we need to elevate our concept of encouragement. George Adams said, "Encouragement is the oxygen of the soul" (in Thomas, *Acts,* 562). It's a great privilege to give Christ-exalting encouragement to fellow soldiers and to receive it from others! Let's look at how we can both give and receive encouragement.[2]

Discussion Questions
What does Luke say are Paul's purposes in his travels?

One reason for this trip was to collect money for Christians in Judea (See Rom. 15:25-29). Why then would Paul want companions for this task (See 2 Cor. 8:16-23; 1 Cor. 16:1-4)?

Are you at all related to Eutychus?

How can we encourage other Christians based on this passage?

[2] Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 298–299.

Why is it important to gather corporately with God's people?

What does the Lord's Supper communicate? Why is participating in it a privilege?

Why is hearing the Word corporately important?

How should we listen to sermons?

What does the raising of Eutychus teach us?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline
Main Idea: This passage illustrates some of the ways believers can give and receive Christ-exalting, Spirit-empowered encouragement.

I. Encouraging the Saints in Macedonia and Greece en Route to Jerusalem (20:1–6)
Chronology is important in the book of Acts because it demonstrates God's sovereign plan for the world as it unfolds through the lives of the apostles. Paul likely left Ephesus in May of AD 55. That date is assumed because Paul mentioned his intention to leave Ephesus after Pentecost in his first letter to the Corinthian believers (1 Corinthians 16:8). The events of Acts **20:1–3** are also explained in 1 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 1–7. Reading these in tandem, we can see that the following events occurred during the three months between Paul's arrival in Greece and his intended departure toward Syria mentioned in Acts **20:3**:

- He intended to use the stay in Greece to collect money for the Jerusalem Christians (1 Corinthians 16:1–4).
- He completed his collection throughout Macedonia (2 Corinthians 8:1–5).
- He stayed in Corinth or nearby in its port city, Cenchreae, for three months. (1 Corinthians 16:5–6).
- He likely penned his great work of theology, the Epistle to the Romans, during this time (Romans 16:1, 23).

Paul hoped to return to Jerusalem for Pentecost. Two Pentecosts so closely mentioned in the text might confuse the reader. Luke reveals that Paul wanted to return to Jerusalem before

spring of the following year, AD 56, so that he could present the collection to the struggling church in Jerusalem. Even so, Paul faced opposition from Jewish leaders, forcing him to modify his travel plans. Instead of taking the sea route, Paul decided to return over land through Macedonia (Acts **20:3**).

He was not alone, though, and was accompanied by many emerging leaders in the church. The names and locations listed in **verse 4** demonstrate the incredible spread of the gospel out of Jerusalem and Antioch throughout all Asia Minor, Galatia, and beyond into Macedonia and Greece. Luke also accompanied Paul.

Luke provides us with another chronological marker as they journeyed from Macedonia through Philippi. Those listed in this verse went ahead of Paul and Luke with the intention of reuniting with them in Troas. The smaller party sailed out of Philippi toward Troas before the rest followed on and were reunited with them (**v 5–6**). The mention of seemingly minor details like times and locations may seem tedious to the reader. These destinations and timestamps, however, bolster the historicity of the Scriptures. Luke does the work of a fine historian as he laces his narrative together with the geographic progression of Paul's mission.[3]

Consider two questions and some answers that emerge from this passage.

A. How can we encourage the saints this week?

First, we need to _____ to others. Paul collected funds to support the church in Jerusalem. This encouraged the saints in both word (as the representatives passed on a good word to the saints) and deed (in terms of the financial gift). Be on the lookout for needs in the body of Christ and give material possessions when possible (cf. Gal 6:2, 10).

Second, we need to _____ with others. Paul went to great pains to visit churches previously established. Follow his example. Don't settle for e-mail or Skype contacts with your Christian friends. Be present with people. It's dangerous to live in isolation. We're made for biblical community. Sharing lunch is one of many things we can do to support one another.

Third, we must _____ with others in ministry. These delegates surely brought Paul (and one another) great encouragement on this trip. One way to forge deep, uplifting relationships is by going after a common goal together.

B. Why don't believers encourage other believers?

I suspect the main reason believers often fail to encourage one another is that we _____ _____. To this, I say, look at the apostle Paul for a moment! Even in his busyness he thought about others.

[3] R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Acts 13–28 for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2019), 105–107.

It could also be that we are often too _____ *to encourage other brothers and sisters*. To this, I say again, look at Paul's example. Great concerns about the future must have filled his mind. Death threats loomed. He desired to go to Jerusalem. Yet he thought about others and encouraged them rather than spending all of his energy focusing on his own problems.

We must realize that our failure to encourage is a sign that we really don't love our brothers and sisters. We love our plans. We love ourselves. So may God break our hearts, leading us to repentance and showing us how we can encourage others this week. Before moving on from this point, I want to touch on ten things that serve to *discourage* fellow brothers and sisters. They are things we should avoid:

1. Being harsh toward or critical of one another
2. Being angry with one another
3. Envying one another
4. Disrespecting one another
5. Avoiding one another
6. Being too busy for one another
7. Puffing ourselves up in front of one another
8. Squeezing the life out of one another
9. Showing no patience with one another
10. Gossiping about one another

Instead of falling into one of these traps, give yourself to the ministry of building up other believers in a spirit of love for Christ and for his people.

II. Encouraging the Saints in Troas in Corporate Worship (20:7–12)

Paul and his companions spent a week in Troas, probably awaiting the departure of their ship. While there they were able to worship with the church. Luke records an unforgettable worship service. Luke's last phrase, "They … were greatly comforted," expresses how much the service encouraged the people of God in Troas. Our worship gatherings too can serve as wonderful means of encouragement when we follow the pattern set forth here…

Of course, we shouldn't try to apply everything here to our modern context. I don't think that insisting on oil lamps or demanding a super long sermon would prove a good idea! Neither should we necessarily neglect what's not mentioned here, like *prayer*. Rather, we should seek to transfer from this account what's transferable.

Since Luke was present ("we," v. 7), he could report several details. The gathering probably began around sunset, after the workday was complete. Paul prolonged his speech until midnight and later went on to speak until daybreak. The length of the sermon highlights the special occasion. The church and Paul knew they had limited time together, so they wanted to use every minute of it. Further, the meeting took place in a home on the third floor. Lamps

were in the room, and Eutychus (who may have been a young boy) sat in the window, trying to get some air. It seems as though Luke is trying not to attach blame to the sleepy young man as he shares what happened. Eutychus was fighting to stay awake as Paul "kept on talking" (v. 9).

After the deadly fall, Paul, by the power of Jesus, was able to raise this young man back to life (v. 10). His actions are not unlike those of Elijah, Elisha, and Peter (cf. 1 Kgs 17:17–24; 2 Kgs 4:32–33; Luke 7:11–17; John 11:1–44; Acts 9:36–41). The church then had a meal (which included the Lord's Supper), and Paul continued speaking until daybreak (v. 11). Luke then makes another comment on Eutychus, saying "they brought the boy home alive," bringing great comfort to the church.

Let's consider three applications.

A. Gather weekly to celebrate the _____ (20:7–12).

Luke says the church met "on the first day of the week" for corporate worship. This day had been set apart by the Lord's resurrection as the Lord's Day (cf. Luke 24:1; 1 Cor 16:1–2; Rev 1:10).

The way Luke describes these events gives the impression that this was simply the norm for churches. Several ancient documents also describe how early Christians gathered on Sundays to celebrate Jesus's resurrection. Each time they did, they were reminding one another that the tomb is empty and the heavenly throne is occupied. This congregation in Troas met in the evenings. Sunday mornings became the more popular gathering time as culture and leadership changed…

Gathering with the church is the best investment of time you could possibly make! If you aren't prioritizing the assembly of the redeemed, beware! It may indicate that your relationship with Jesus isn't what it should be… You have a role to play in the weekly assembly. You come not to be entertained but to encourage and receive encouragement. For the good of your own soul and for the good of the souls of your brothers and sisters, protect corporate worship times.

B. Gather weekly to experience the _____ (20:7, 11).

Luke mentions the Lord's Supper in the same way, as a common event in the life of the gathered church (see 1 Cor 11:17–34, "when you come together"). It was probably shared in the context of a meal. John Stott says, "Word and sacrament [the Lord's Supper] were combined in the ministry given to the church at Troas, and the universal church has followed suit ever since" (*Message of Acts,* 321). Let's consider three aspects of the Lord's Supper.

1. The _____. Paul was able to remember Jesus's substitutionary death through the Lord's Supper with individuals who couldn't have been Christians for long. It must have been an encouraging experience to see former pagans take the bread and the cup. It must have also

been an incredibly joyous experience for the believers in Troas to take the bread and the cup with the apostle Paul. He had sacrificed so much for the cause of the gospel.

2. The _____. So how often should we take the Lord's Supper? It seems the early church took the Lord's Supper weekly. After the church spread out from Jerusalem, became more stabilized, and began meeting weekly for worship, the Lord's Supper became a weekly experience. John Stott says, "The disciples met on the Lord's Day for the Lord's Supper. At least verse 7 sounds like a description of the normal, regular practice of the church in Troas" (*Message of Acts,* 321)…I don't want to be overly critical on this matter. To be fair, in Scripture we don't find an explicit command to take the Lord's Supper weekly. If we did, I'm sure most Bible-believing churches would be doing so. Nevertheless, this does seem to be the pattern of the early churches. And it's a wonderful privilege to enjoy!

3. The _____. The Lord's Supper is powerful in its *reception*. While we shouldn't go so far as to view the elements as transforming into the actual body and blood of Jesus, it's also wrong to minimize the experience of the Table. Many Christians grow up only hearing what the Lord's Supper is *not*. In hearing such negativity associated with it, they tend to have a low view of the Supper, assuming nothing special happens when we take it. In truth we should experience profound delight and deep joy when we come to the Table. We should take it repentantly, prayerfully, gratefully, and joyfully. J. I. Packer notes, "At the Holy Table, above all, let there be praise" (cited in Van Neste, *Lord's Supper,* 363). Yes indeed. May we take Communion with holy praise to the Lamb!

The Lord's Supper is also powerful in its *proclamation*. Sermons preach to the *ear*. The Lord's Supper preaches to the *eye*. And the preached Word has great power. In the Lord's Supper people get to see and hear the gospel proclaimed through the explanation of the elements. We shouldn't minimize this fact…The Lord's Supper is also powerful in its *unification.* In his letter to the Corinthians Paul speaks much about the call for unity at the Table because the "haves" weren't treating the "have-nots" appropriately (1 Cor 11:17–34). At the Table we Christians confess our unity in Christ.

C. Gather weekly to hear the _____ (20:7–12).

The church in Troas also gathered to hear the apostle Paul teach. Paul "kept on talking" until midnight (vv. 7, 9), and then he "talked" with them until daybreak (v. 11). The first part of the evening may have been a lecture, an argument based on Scripture that could have included some questions and answers, whereas the latter address was more of a casual conversation. Regarding the latter, John Stott says, "It was clearly more free and open than a formal sermon" (*Message of Acts,* 321).

Obviously this was a unique event. But we should see from this text (and the rest of the Bible) that the preaching and teaching of God's Word is to be taken *seriously*. Paul gave Timothy this instruction about corporate worship: "Until I come, give your attention to public reading, exhortation, and teaching" (1 Tim 4:13).

How, then, should you listen to a sermon? Here a few pointers:

1. Listen *humbly.* Realize that you need God's Word. Don't listen with a grudge or with a spirit of arrogance. Don't allow familiarity with the text or even with the speaker's general message to block your desire to meet Christ in the Scriptures.
2. Listen *intently.* Do whatever you must to stay engaged with the message. Say "amen," sit in the front, or take notes. Listen attentively, like the audience in Nehemiah 8. Fight the urge to fall asleep or to mentally check out.
3. Listen *biblically*. Use your mind to weigh what is taught against what you already know of the Bible, as the Bereans did.
4. Listen *personally*. Listen for yourself, not just for someone "who needed to hear that."
5. Listen *communally*. Listen for the good of your brothers and sisters. Who knows? It could be that you'll hear something within the message that you can later use to encourage someone.
6. Listen *missionally*. Don't merely be a receiver of the Word; be a reproducer of the Word. Listen in order to make disciples of all nations.
7. Listen *practically*. Think about ways you should change your behavior based on what you hear.
8. Listen *gratefully*. Be thankful that God speaks to his people, including you!

Remember, too, that it's important to get adequate rest before corporate worship. Prepare for corporate worship as you would prepare for other important events.

Conclusion/Missional Challenge

In summary, Acts 20:1–12 illustrates the ministry of Christ-exalting, Spirit-empowered encouragement. We may encourage people in personal meetings, through financial offerings, in gospel partnerships, and in our weekly worship assemblies. In all things let's commit ourselves to building up one another. And let's be thankful that we have the Comforter, the *Holy Spirit*, with us, in us, and working through us for this ministry.

After all, we have the greatest news in the world to share. Our God raises the dead! The living Christ gives us power to persevere in the faith, to advance the gospel in the midst of persecution, and to sing in days of discouragement. Keep pointing your brothers and sisters to Jesus Christ, the resurrection and the life. The gospel message is not only for the unrepentant sinner but also for the redeemed saint.

Lesson 35 (10-9-22):
Caring for the Blood-Bought Church of God (Acts 20:13-38)

13 But going ahead to the ship, we set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul aboard there, for so
he had arranged, intending himself to go by land. **14** And when he met us at Assos, we took him
on board and went to Mitylene. **15** And sailing from there we came the following day opposite
Chios; the next day we touched at Samos; and the day after that we went to Miletus. **16** For Paul
had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was
hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

17 Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.
18 And when they came to him, he said to them: "You yourselves know how I lived among you
the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, **19** serving the Lord with all humility and
with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; **20** how I did not
shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from
house to house, **21** testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith
in our Lord Jesus Christ. **22** And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit,
not knowing what will happen to me there, **23** except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every
city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. **24** But I do not account my life of any value nor
as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the
Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. **25** And now, behold, I know that none of
you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.
26 Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, **27** for I did not shrink
from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you
overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. **29** I know that
after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; **30** and from
among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after
them. **31** Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to
admonish every one with tears. **32** And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace,
which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are
sanctified. **33** I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. **34** You yourselves know that these
hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. **35** In all things I have shown
you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the
Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. **37** And there was
much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, **38** being sorrowful most of

all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

- Acts 20:13-38 ESV

The book of Acts is filled with speeches. Some are addressed to non-Christians (Acts 13; 14; 17), and others are defenses (Acts 22–26). But this address in Acts 20 is different. It's addressed to the Christian leaders of the church in Ephesus. To be even more specific, it's a farewell speech. The Bible contains several important farewell speeches that prepare people for the future (Gen 49–50; Deuteronomy; Josh 23:1–24:27; 1 Sam 12:1–25; John 13–17; also 2 Timothy and 2 Peter).

In this speech Paul highlights the nature of pastoral oversight and the importance of the church. A good one-sentence summary of Paul's charge is given in verse 28:

> *Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.* (Acts 20:28)

This text sounds a lot like Paul's later charge to Timothy, in which Paul essentially summarizes the nature of pastoral ministry in one verse. He urges Timothy to watch both his *life* and his *teaching* for the good of his soul and the good of others:

> *Pay close attention to your life and your teaching; persevere in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.* (1 Tim 4:16)

Indeed, this speech in Acts is very Pauline. It sounds like Paul's pastoral letters and is consistent with what Paul said to both Timothy and Titus…Paul's address to the Ephesian elders is a mingling of both *example* and *exhortation*. His example serves to both inspire and instruct the elders who will be leading the church from this point forward. His exhortation includes some important matters related to pastoral oversight.

Obviously, pastors/elders/overseers (synonymous terms in the New Testament; see vv. 17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7) should pay careful attention to Paul's words here, but they're beneficial for all God's people. Every Christian should care about the church and should seek to follow Paul's example, just as he followed after Christ (1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:17). Further, even those who are not Christians, but are exploring the Christian faith, will find that by studying the church, they will learn a lot about Jesus.

While this address is difficult to outline, as John Polhill notes (*Acts,* 423), we will look at it in three parts.[1]

[1] Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 311–313.

Discussion Questions
What is driving Paul forward in his journey (See Acts 20:24; Philippians 3:7-8)?

What actions and attitudes had Paul practiced as a model for Christian leaders (see 20:17–27, 33–35)?

What warning and command did Paul repeat (see 20:28–31)?

What would protect the elders in the face of this danger (see 20:32)?

What dangers threaten your church and the church worldwide?

Think about ministries that you are involved in. How do Paul's priorities here shape your priorities in those ministries?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline
Main Idea: Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders highlights the nature and importance of the church and the role of its overseers.

I. Paul's Example (20:13–27)
In verses 13–16 we see Paul rushing to get to Jerusalem to make it for Pentecost. Perhaps Paul wanted to present the offerings from the Gentiles during the Feast of Weeks, which Jewish tradition also associated with Gentiles' hearing God's Word at Sinai, alongside Israel (Johnson, *Let's Study Acts,* 251; see Exod 19:1; 34:22; Deut 16:9–12; Acts 2:1). Seven weeks separated Passover from Pentecost. Paul can't risk a long delay in Ephesus—either fruitful ministry or continued opposition could keep him there for a while—so the apostle bypasses Ephesus and lands farther south in Miletus (vv. 13–15). Despite Paul's hurry, he still makes the time to invest in elders, demonstrating his care for the Ephesian church and its leaders. In Miletus, Paul gives them this powerful charge, which we have in summary form, and the apostle begins with his own example. As a good leader Paul offered more than words. His life illustrated his teaching.

A. He identified with _____ (20:18).

According to verse 18, Paul had lived among and identified with the people of Ephesus. In writing to the Thessalonians, Paul said something similar: "You know how we lived among you" (1 Thess 1:5; cf. 2:7–11). Because Paul was with his people, he knew their needs and how to apply God's Word to those needs (v. 20). Paul didn't have a celebrity ministry that allowed him to hide out in an office after delivering his speeches. He was with his people…I don't want to be slavish in applying this to pastors because I know every pastoral setting is different. But I would ask this question of each career minister: If you aren't spending time with your people outside the pulpit, then are you really following Paul's pattern?

B. He served the Lord with _____ and _____ (20:19).

Verse 19 makes clear that Paul saw his ministry as *serving the Lord…*Everyone serves something or someone, so who or what are we serving? Even the most mundane activities should be done for the Lord (Col 3:23–24). Most importantly, Paul says he served the Lord with *humility, tears,* and during *trials*. His humility denotes his posture before God and people. His trials remind us of his courage and faithfulness. His tears call attention to his tenderness (cf. v. 31). I would submit that this kind of service to the Lord is a direct result of a proper grasp of the gospel. The gospel—when applied deeply—humbles us, makes us tender, and makes us courageous…In a world filled with bullies and cowards, we desperately need men and women to be transformed by the gospel so that they too may become humble, tender, and courageous.

C. He taught _____ (20:20–21).

Paul, who had been so deeply changed by grace, taught the gospel of grace to everyone, everywhere. Here, then, is another wonderful example for us to follow. Don't shrink back from teaching anything that's profitable—even if it's in the Old Testament! Be bold in your exposition in this age of tolerance. Don't cave in to culture, but lovingly and courageously teach the "whole plan of God" (v. 27).

D. He lived by the _____ and treasured _____ supremely (20:22–24).

Paul knew that going to Jerusalem would involve suffering, but because he valued Jesus above comfort and even his own life, he was willing to go. His desire was to finish the ministry Jesus gave him (cf. 2 Tim 4:7). The goal of life is not to have a long life but a full life, one lived to the glory of Jesus Christ. For some Christians such faithfulness will involve hardship, persecution, and even martyrdom. Paul's example here shows how one can endure such experiences: We must value Jesus above everything, and we must rely on the Spirit.

E. He served with a _____ (20:25–27).

How could Paul say he was innocent of the blood of all his hearers? Because he didn't shrink back from comprehensively declaring God's Word to them. He preached the redemptive plan of God, promised in the Old Testament, fulfilled in the gospel (1 Cor 2:2; Col 1:27–29). Paul's faithful exposition exonerated him from responsibility for the blood of his hearers (Johnson, *Let's Study Acts,* 252). Paul may have been alluding to Ezekiel's prophetic ministry. God called Ezekiel to be a faithful watchman (Ezek 3:18–19; 33:1–9). The prophet's job, then, was to sound the alarm when he saw danger. If the citizens failed to heed the warning, then they would have

no one to blame for the consequences except themselves (ibid., 253). Paul could say that he sounded the alarm. He faithfully preached the life-and-death message of the gospel; therefore, his conscience was clear.

II. Paul's Exhortations (20:28–32)

After looking back, Paul looks ahead. He announces his departure for Jerusalem, along with his expectation never to see the elders again. He also predicts future dangers to the church. In light of these things, he exhorts the elders to watch their own lives and to watch over the flock. Paul raises a number of important concepts here.

First, the Holy Spirit ultimately appoints elders (v. 28a). A man can't call himself into the ministry. The Spirit of God works in the heart of a man, giving him a desire for the task (1 Tim 3:1). The local congregation then affirms his Spirit-initiated calling (cf. Acts 13:2–3). No one, then, should take the office of elder lightly. Importantly, you don't have to be an elder to do significant kingdom work. If the Spirit of God isn't calling you to this task, then find other ways to make a gospel impact in the world. The Spirit uses every Christian to do ministry (Eph 4:7–16).

Second, God paid the highest possible price for the church (v. 28b). How valuable is the church? She was purchased by the blood of Jesus (the title "God" here probably referring to "Jesus"; cf. Rom 9:5). This means we should never have a low view of the church. We should love the church deeply, and shepherds should care for the church carefully.

With this in mind, consider Paul's two charges to the elders.

A. Watch your _____ (20:28a).

Paul reminds the elders of the utter necessity of godly lives (cf. 1 Tim 4:16). Robert Murray McCheyne said it well: "My people's greatest need is my personal holiness" (in J. I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness,* 33). Holiness is necessary for faithfulness in ministry. You may be gifted to do the work to which God has called you, but if you aren't godly, then you won't have a ministry. Just ask the countless pastors who have fallen morally and are no longer serving in the pastorate. Many of them are incredibly gifted and bright. But it doesn't matter how good your theology is or how dynamically you speak if your character doesn't match your teaching. If you don't have holiness, you won't have a ministry. I'm not talking about living in sinless perfection. I'm talking about living "above reproach" (1 Tim 3:1–7).

B. Watch the _____ (20:28b–32).

Paul warns the elders about what will happen after his departure. Not only do churches face the threat of wolves on the outside, but sometimes wolves will "come in among" the believers, too. Paul predicts that some teachers—for their own devious reasons—will try to attract disciples to themselves rather than to Christ (v. 30). They will pose as pastors but will actually be predators (cf. Matt 7:15). Paul thus tells the elders to keep a watch on *themselves*—to watch *one another* for the good of the flock. Paul is not only emphasizing personal accountability (1

Tim 4:16) but also *mutual accountability*. And this is one of the reasons a *plurality* of elders/pastors is so important (see Acts 14:23; Jas 5:14). Leaders need to be held accountable for how they live and for what they teach. They need to "guard each other from *error* and *arrogance*, and the flock from *abuse*" (Johnson, *Let's Study Acts,* 256; emphasis added).

III. Paul's Example—Again (20:33–38)

While it seems like the speech concludes with verse 32, Paul doesn't stop there. He wants to take up one more important matter: the leader's relationship to material goods. Every Christian—not just elders—should pay careful attention to Paul's theology and practice of work and wealth here.

A. He avoided _____, worked hard, and practiced _____ (20:33–35).

Paul's testimony here is consistent with what he says elsewhere regarding work and wealth. Paul avoided greed and never used ministry as a means to cover it up (1 Thess 2:5). He supported himself by working with his hands, as we observed in Corinth (Acts 18:2–3; cf. 1 Cor 4:12; 9:12, 15; 2 Cor 11:7). We read of the same pattern in Thessalonica, where Paul described his work ethic (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:7–8) and also urged his readers to imitate him (1 Thess 4:11; 2 Thess 3:9)… Paul quotes the saying of Jesus, reminding the elders that they should be givers, not takers. They should also remember that one experiences tremendous *blessing* when practicing generosity. Church leaders should set the example of grace-motivated generosity. Jesus himself, the chief Shepherd, modeled this concept. He gave everything in order to help us in our poor, weak condition (2 Cor 8:9). The more we understand the grace of Jesus, the more generous we become.

B. He loved the _____ (20:36–38).

Verses 36–38 are transitional; they conclude Paul's Ephesian ministry and connect to the narrative of Paul's journey to Jerusalem (21:1–16). The warmth and love between believers expressed in these verses are expressed again in this next section.

Conclusion/Missional Challenge

Looking back over the Miletus address, one can't help but ponder the richness and relevance of the *shepherding* metaphor for pastoral ministry. A pastor isn't a cowboy, he's not a CEO, he's not a rock-star celebrity; he's a shepherd. Faithful shepherds know the flock, care for the flock, pray for the flock, feed the flock, and protect the flock from wolves. We should be careful to build our philosophy of pastoral ministry, then, from *the Bible*—not from popular leadership books (though we can learn from them). Pastoral leadership is unique and important; therefore, let everyone who aspires to the office of the overseer do so with humility and dependence on the great Shepherd (Heb 13:20). He purchased the church with his own blood.

Take a moment to pray for your elders/pastors. In what specific ways might you encourage them?

Lesson 36 (10-16-22):
Paul's Journey to Jerusalem (Acts 20:36-21:16)

36 And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. **37** And there was
much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, **38** being sorrowful most of
all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they
accompanied him to the ship.

21 And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and
the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. **2** And having found a ship crossing to
Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. **3** When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on
the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo. **4** And
having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they
were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. **5** When our days there were ended, we departed
and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were
outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed **6** and said farewell to one
another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.

7 When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we greeted the
brothers and stayed with them for one day. **8** On the next day we departed and came to
Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and
stayed with him. **9** He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. **10** While we were staying
for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. **11** And coming to us, he took
Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how
the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of
the Gentiles.' " **12** When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to
Jerusalem. **13** Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I
am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord
Jesus." **14** And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be
done."

15 After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. **16** And some of the disciples from
Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with
whom we should lodge.

- Acts 20:36-21:16 ESV

Courageous commitment, stemming from strong convictions, is an essential quality found in all those whom God chooses to lead…The apostle Paul stood in a line of saints who held such

strong convictions…Paul never wavered in his conviction that he was to fulfill God's will, which gave him the courage to see his ministry through no matter what the personal consequences.[1]

If you seek to follow Jesus, you will come to various crossroads in your life. You will have to make many difficult decisions—some that may even make your loved ones question your sanity! In Acts 21 the apostle Paul's life illustrates the painful pleasure of following Jesus. Paul is a man on a mission, headed to Jerusalem. His friends think he's crazy for going there. But Paul is "resolved" (19:21) and "compelled by the Spirit" (20:22), so he must go.[2]

Regarding knowing God's will, certain classic explanations are very helpful. For example, the "Four Councils"—the councils of God's Word, the Holy Spirit, conscience, others—taken together, often reveal God's will. A heart that is saved, Spirit-filled, sanctified, submitted to God can know God's will. Augustine's advice, rightly understood, is also pertinent: "Love God and do what you want." Christians who really do want to know God's will, will know it. In seeking God's will and doing it, a few practical reminders are in order:

- *Seek good advisers*. Be discerning as you choose those from whom you will accept advice.
- *Spend time with God regularly*. A certain young woman, trying to decide God's will regarding a marriage proposal, took a week off work and vacationed with her Bible and her Lord. She was a wise woman.
- *Realize that God's will may not be what you want*. Many of us are like the little girl who wrote an honest thank-you note: "Thank you for your present. I have always wanted a pin cushion, but not very much." This is humorous in children but sad in God's children.
- Finally, and most importantly, *if we know what God wants us to do, we must do it*. For most of us, the problem is not that of knowing God's will but of obeying it.

The final words of Richard Baxter say it all: "Lord, what thou wilt, where thou wilt, and when thou wilt."[3]

Discussion Questions

The Ephesian elders react with tears and grief to Paul's departure, especially his words about never seeing them again. What does this communicate about the character of his ministry and the kind of person Paul was?

Why was Paul going to Jerusalem (see 20:22; 24:17)?

---

[1] John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 234–235.

[2] Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 322.

[3] R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 289–290.

The Holy Spirit repeatedly warned Paul both internally and through prophets that danger waited in Jerusalem (see 20:22–25; 21:4, 10–13). With what attitude did Paul respond to these warnings (see 20:24; 21:13)?

Why do you think the Holy Spirit warned Paul repeatedly of his destiny in Jerusalem? (For instance, did He want Paul not to go? Why do you think so or not?)

In your judgment, was Paul right or wrong to go to Jerusalem? Why?

Paul's friends in Caesarea eventually accepted his decision to go to Jerusalem and said "May the Lord's will be done" (21:14), echoing Jesus' words in the Lord's Prayer and in Gethsemane. What are some situations right now for which you may need to say "May the Lord's will be done"?

When have you made decisions against the wishes of people you admired and trusted? What happened?

What does 20:1–21:16 reveal about God, especially the Holy Spirit?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline
Main Idea: Paul's trip to Jerusalem illustrates the gift of Christian friendship and powerfully portrays the cost of Christian discipleship.

Before we examine the dominant theme in this text—*the cost of discipleship*—another theme stands out and deserves attention: that of *Christian friendship*. Paul's trip is punctuated by a chain of hellos and good-byes, which underscores the value of relationships within the body of Christ and provides some insight into how to interact in Christian love.

I. The Gift of Christian Friendship (20:36–21:16)
We pick up the story with Paul saying good-bye to the Ephesian elders. Farewells tend to be memorable and special, and this one certainly was. After studying Paul's ministry in Ephesus, and in light of everything Paul said in his farewell speech, we can understand that Paul loved

these men. And these elders loved Paul. So they displayed understandable affection and emotion. They knelt on the beach and prayed together. Then the group escorted Paul to the ship, perhaps comforting one another with the reality that they would see Paul again in glory. It's a moving picture of Christ-centered community.

A. The need for _____

It's remarkable to observe how often Paul is surrounded by Christian friends as he does the work God called him to do. Paul travels with friends. He stays with them. He visits them. He works alongside them. Here in Acts 21 we see this trait on display again. His friends surround him. They journey together. They spend time together. They talk together. They weep together. They no doubt laugh together. And they pray together. Is Paul's constant contact with friends due to a weakness in his life? Is this merely the result of Paul's personality? I don't think so. I believe Paul surrounded himself with friends because he, like every person, is created in the image of God. And we humans are made for community. God exists in a perfect triune relationship, and we, who are made by him and in his likeness, are built for friendships.

B. How Christian friendship is _____

When you become a Christian, you not only enter into a new relationship with God through Jesus, but you also enter into new relationships with other believers (1 John 3:11–15). We see this reality illustrated in Acts 21. As Paul journeys through these various places and meets with various groups of people (some of whom he probably hadn't previously met!), we see a beautiful truth at work: the gospel creates spiritual friendships…Christians are united in the Holy Spirit. Paul told the Ephesians, "[Make] every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3). Paul didn't say to "attain" the unity of the Spirit, but to "keep" it. We can't ultimately create Christian fellowship; God establishes it. It's our job then to cultivate it, to work on it, to maintain it.

C. How Christian friendship is _____

I see at least four ways Christian friendship gets expressed in this text.

1. Practicing _____. The believers shared time and possessions with one another in general and shared their *homes* in particular. In at least four places, Paul stays with fellow believers: in Tyre (v. 4), in Ptolemais (v. 7), in Caesarea (v. 8), and finally in the home of Mnason of Cyprus at Jerusalem (v. 16). This indicates that early Christians didn't say, "*My* home is *my* refuge," as we often hear people today do in trying to justify self-indulgence and people avoidance. These believers viewed their homes as gifts from God (cf. Jas 1:17) and as places to be used for ministry and as a blessing to others.

2. Showing _____*.* These friends displayed *visible, physical affection* for one another. We see them weeping, embracing, and kissing. In 21:5 we see that whole families accompanied Paul to the ship and knelt down with him in support. I don't want to push this too far, but we should somehow show our love for one another visibly. We should shake hands, offer hugs when appropriate, even give an encouraging shoulder pat. Paul tells the Romans, "Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters" (Rom 12:10).

3. _____ *together.* We see the Ephesian elders praying for Paul (20:36), and then the Christians in Tyre pray for him (21:5). John Polhill comments, "The reference to prayer is not incidental. Everyone was fully aware of the difficulties facing Paul at Jerusalem. They were also aware that prayer was the disciple's best fortification in a time of suffering and trial" (*Acts,* 434). Let's learn from this example. Deep Christian friendship involves times of fervent prayer for one another (cf. Rom 12:12). So pray for protection, blessing, guidance, healing, relationships, and all other aspects of life and ministry when you gather with believing friends.

4. Discussing important _____*. Acting on* God's will wasn't merely a private matter for Paul. Others weighed in on his decision to go to Jerusalem. Following God's guidance involves allowing others to give you counsel. It doesn't mean their counsel is always right. In this case the Christians had really good intentions. They urged him not to go to Jerusalem. Paul, however, had to make the difficult decision to reject their counsel because he sensed God was leading him—like Jesus—to face suffering in Jerusalem.

So then, basic Christianity involves experiencing Christian friendships that are created by Jesus and cultivated through practices like those we see in 20:36–21:16.

II. The Cost of Christian Discipleship (20:36–21:16)

Paul is confident that God is leading him to Jerusalem. At the same time, other Christians are equally as confident that God has *not* called Paul to go to Jerusalem. So what do we do when we hear conflicting voices concerning the will of God? Let's consider the perspectives on Paul's decision and draw some practical guidance for following Jesus.

A. Perspectives on Paul's decision

1. The perspective of _____ *(21:1–3).* Paul is in a hurry. Luke uses phrases like "the next day," "another boat," and "we boarded another ship" to tell us about this stage of the journey. The apostle is moving quickly because he wants to be in Jerusalem by Pentecost (20:16), even though he knows it will involve suffering (20:22–24). He is determined to give a love offering from the Gentile churches to the Jerusalem churches and to testify there about the gospel of the grace of God (20:24). Paul doesn't care about the danger; he cares about obeying God's will, regardless of the cost.

2. The perspective of the _____ *(21:4–6).* "They told Paul not to go to Jerusalem" (v. 4). However, Paul didn't heed their counsel (vv. 5–6). How do we reconcile this text with the previous texts about the Spirit leading Paul to Jerusalem (19:21; 20:22–23)? Let's read on before handling this matter.

3. The perspective of the _____ *(21:7–13).* As Paul stays with Philip, he meets the prophet Agabus (v. 10; cf. 11:28–30), who gives Paul an object lesson in the tradition of Old Testament prophets (e.g., 1 Kgs 11:29–32; Isa 20:2–6; Jer 13:1–11). Agabus took Paul's long belt, normally wrapped several times around the waist, and tied up his hands and feet with it. Then the prophet predicted that the Jews would tie Paul up and deliver him over to

the Gentiles (v. 11). Though Agabus didn't forbid him from going to Jerusalem, he did warn Paul of the events to come. Following this dire prediction, the concerned saints in Caesarea (like the saints in Tyre) urged Paul not to go to the city (v. 12). But their counsel also proved fruitless (v. 13). Paul wouldn't be deterred.

4. The perspective of _____ (21:12, 14). Luke even included himself in the dissenting number. His presence is denoted by the "we" references at work throughout this passage. Apparently Luke also pleaded with Paul to change his plans. But after Paul rejected these pleas, too, the disciples surrendered (v. 14). The Christians respected their beloved leader's firm conviction.

What should we make of these various perspectives? Some have tried to argue that Paul was being disobedient in going to Jerusalem. Luke, however, believed Paul was right in going to Jerusalem, as indicated by the references to the Spirit in 19:21 and 20:22. The Spirit led Paul to make the decision to go to Jerusalem, and he also provided the compulsion to go (Stott, *Message of Acts,* 333). Further, Luke clearly sees Paul as following in his Lord's footsteps (ibid.).

With that said, what should we do with verses 4 and 11—these references to the Spirit? I like Stott's explanation: "[We should] draw a distinction between a *prediction* and a *prohibition*" (*Message of Acts*; emphasis added). Agabus simply predicted what would happen. The conclusions Paul's friends made based on that information weren't infallible. They were human deductions. All of this, then, helps us understand 21:4. It's probably best to take Luke's statement as a "condensed way of saying that the warning was divine while the urging was human" (ibid.). This is consistent with the Spirit's previous word to Paul. John Stott notes, "After all, the Spirit's word to Paul combined the compulsion to go with a warning of the consequences (20:22–23)" (ibid.).

Paul's decision should be admired. It was a difficult decision. But such is the cost of following Jesus. We can understand the dissenting voices. These people loved Paul. They were well intended. When they considered the inevitable suffering that awaited him, they naturally urged him to choose another path.

B. Principles to apply

1. Love people, but love Jesus more. Paul clearly loved people in general, and his Christian friends in particular. Yet Paul treasured Jesus more than anyone. And so must we (cf. Matt 10:37). We must resist the urge to be people pleasers, choosing instead to be Jesus pleasers. We need to be able to say, like Paul, "I am ready … to die … for the name of the Lord Jesus" (21:13). No one or no thing is more valuable than Jesus. And we are ultimately accountable to him. So treasure the Lord supremely.

2. Value input, but follow God's will. Paul listened to the counsel of others. The book of Proverbs teaches the value of heeding godly counsel (e.g., Prov 15:22; 20:18). Refusing to allow

other Christian friends to speak into our lives is foolish. But at the same time, there may be occasions when following Jesus will make us look foolish.

3. There's something worse than dying: not living. Life is short. Don't waste it! Pour yourself out for the good of others, and then you will actually find life (Mark 8:34–35). This may involve risk and hardship, but it's worth it. Let us say with Paul, "I consider my life of no value to myself; my purpose is to finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of God's grace" (Acts 20:24).

4. When you follow Jesus down the Calvary road, you're not alone and you won't regret it. Jesus—our unfailing friend—is with us as we make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18–20). And even though suffering may be inevitable, following Jesus is worth it. This life is not the end. The best is yet to come (Phil 1:21–23). As John Piper commented on Acts 20:24, "Lord, keep me faithful to the job, then let me drop and go to my reward" (in Chandler, "My Heart Is Full"). When we see Christ, we will not regret having followed him.

5. Following Jesus is costly, but not following Jesus is more costly. I can see how an unbeliever could look at Paul's life—and Jesus's for that matter—and say, "What a waste!" But Scripture gives us a different view. Jesus said these words to his disciples about the disastrous result of pursuing material gain instead of him:

What does it benefit someone to gain the whole world and yet lose his life? What can anyone give in exchange for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. (Mark 8:36–38)

The only thing more costly than discipleship is the cost of "nondiscipleship." Follow Jesus now, and you will experience unspeakable joy later. Reject him now, and you will experience eternal suffering later. He bids us to come and follow him. Let's surrender to his lordship.

Conclusion/Missional Challenge

We can learn something revolutionary from Paul: fully aware of the impending suffering to befall him, he did not hesitate to continue on his mission. His chief concern in life was not comfort, safety, or a long life. His chief purpose, rather, centered on the proclamation of the gospel of God, whatever the cost. God summons all his people to trust perfectly in his will. Indeed, the suffering that Paul faced in his earthly life brought much glory to God. Paul's sufferings also bore tremendous fruit as his tribulations often resulted in the advancement of the gospel and the kingdom of God. In the Christian worldview, therefore, the question should not be "Why does suffering happen to me?" but rather, "How can I proclaim the gospel of Jesus in the midst of my trials?"[4]

[4] R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Acts 13–28 for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2019), 123.

Lesson 37 (10-23-22):
Paul in Jerusalem, Part 1a (Acts 21:17-36)

Paul Visits James

17 When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. **18** On the following day
Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. **19** After greeting them, he
related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.
20 And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how
many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for
the law, **21** and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the
Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our
customs. **22** What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. **23** Do
therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; **24** take these men and
purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads.
Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you
yourself also live in observance of the law. **25** But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we
have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to
idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality." **26** Then
Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the
temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering
presented for each one of them.

Paul Arrested in the Temple

27 When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple,
stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, **28** crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the
man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place.
Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." **29** For they
had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul
had brought him into the temple. **30** Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran
together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut.
31 And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all
Jerusalem was in confusion. **32** He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them.
And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. **33** Then the tribune
came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he
was and what he had done. **34** Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another. And
as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the
barracks. **35** And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of
the violence of the crowd, **36** for the mob of the people followed, crying out, "Away with him!"

- Acts 21:17-36 ESV

Every year in college football a few schools have dominant offenses, while a few others have phenomenal defenses. So-called Monday morning quarterbacks debate which teams are better. One group says, "Defense wins championships!" Others declare, "A good defense is a good offense!" Actually, both offense and defense are important. The same is true in the Christian faith.

Believers must be effective on *offense*, taking the gospel to the nations. But we also have to be effective on *defense*, "ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks … for a reason for the hope that is in [us]" (1 Pet 3:15). Usually the focus of fulfilling our Christian mission is on offense—initiating gospel conversations with unbelievers. But sometimes unbelievers may actually start gospel conversations with us, and in those situations we must be ready to explain why we're Christians.

For the last decade of his life Paul has intentionally engaged strategic centers with the gospel during his three missionary journeys. But now we'll observe Paul playing defense. The apostle becomes a prisoner, and the rest of his ministry recorded in Acts is basically a set of reactions to opposition and assaults.

In Acts 21–26 we read of five defense speeches given by the apostle Paul and also learn what happens in between them. In the first two speeches Paul defends himself in Jerusalem before the Jewish crowd (22:1–21) and before the supreme Jewish council (23:1–6). His next three defenses are given in Caesarea. He goes before Felix in chapter 24, Festus in chapter 25, and finally King Herod Agrippa II in chapter 26. Because we, too, will face opposition, and because we must be good defenders of the faith like Paul, these chapters are relevant.

In what follows we will consider Paul's welcome in Jerusalem (21:17–26), the hostility of the Jewish crowd (21:27–36), and Paul's defense before the Jewish crowd (21:37–22:21). In these we will see an example of humility and love that we should pursue; an example of hostility and lies that we may face; and an example of the type of honesty and loyalty that should characterize our lives and conversations.[1]

Discussion Questions
After an initially enthusiastic welcome to Jerusalem, what concerns do the believers express over Paul's arrival (21:17-25)?

This issue was supposedly settled at least six years earlier (see ch. 15). Why do these tensions still plague Jerusalem believers?

Why did the leaders of the Jerusalem church want Paul to participate in the vow (see 21:20–25)? In their eyes, how would this act serve the gospel?

[1] Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 334–335.

By joining in Jewish rites, do you think Paul was undermining his teaching to the Gentiles in Galatians 2:11–5:15? Was he being like Peter in Galatians 2:11–14? Why or why not? (You might look at Romans 15:1–2; 1 Corinthians 9:19–23.)

What might have been some of Paul's reasons for doing as these believers asked? (Do 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 and Romans 14:13–15:3 shed light on his possible motives?)

What ethnic or religious customs (Jewish, Catholic, American, African, and so on) may a believer practice, and what customs may he not practice? (Think of some specific examples that are important to you.) How do you decide?

What can 21:17–26 teach us about dealing with differences within the church today?

Compare the reaction against Paul (vv.30-31) with that against Stephen (6:11-13) 20 years earlier. What does this reveal about Christian-Jewish relationships in Jerusalem during this period?

How well does the church leaders' plan for Paul work? What happens in 21:27-36?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline

Main Idea: Paul gets attacked by a Jewish mob while participating in a vow, and then he gives a defense speech before the crowd.

I. _____ and _____ Displayed in James and Paul (21:17–26)

When Paul arrives in Jerusalem, things get interesting on day two. A formal meeting takes place between Paul, James (Jesus's half brother and primary spokesman of the Jerusalem church), and the Jerusalem elders. In this meeting we find a few wonderful expressions of humility and love.

A. A God-centered _____ (21:18–20a)

James and Paul together praise God for the victories achieved among the Gentiles. "God had done" the work among them (v. 19). Paul didn't brag; he gave glory to God. He also related "in

detail" what God did on his journeys. It's a good practice to recount the evidences of God's grace and to share them with others. The psalmist says, "My soul, bless the LORD, and do not forget all his benefits" (103:2 ESV). So don't forget them. Don't take what God does for granted. Treasure it. Tell others about it.

When the Jewish brothers heard these things, they too "glorified God" (v. 20). The report concerned what God did among *the Gentiles.* And to it the Jewish Christians respond with joy, not jealousy or suspicion. This worshipful reaction is similar to previous reactions when the Jewish Christians received reports of God's grace shown to Cornelius, the Greeks in Antioch, and in the first missionary journey (11:18, 22–23; 14:27; 15:12).

At times it's difficult for some Christians to rejoice when God is working through someone else or through someone else's church. But that's an attitude from which the follower of Jesus must repent. We must take note of the united praise that takes place here in Jerusalem. When God is at work in other places, saving sinners by his amazing grace, it's always a reason to rejoice! We are never in competition with other like-minded Christians; we're on the same team!

B. A Grace-motivated _____

At some point, in response to the grace of Jesus, certain Christians presented a love offering to the church in Jerusalem. This gift accomplished two purposes. It served as a means of helping the poor (cf. Acts 11:27–30; 20:35; 2 Cor 8:9; Gal 2:10; 6:10), and it also served as a symbol of unity. In sending it, the Gentile Christians were humbly and lovingly expressing their solidarity with the Jewish Christians.

Providing resources to others is a tangible way of expressing love and support. Christians should regularly display acts of generosity because we have received such amazing grace from Jesus. Let us look for ways to bless others through tangible gifts. Unfortunately the gift in this case didn't actually accomplish the unifying purpose Paul hoped it would (Rom 15:31). It's possible that the "more right-winged elements in the church were distinctly cold towards it" (Marshall, *Acts of the Apostles,* 342). The reason? Paul's reputation was suffering. James gives Paul an interesting proposal in hopes of disarming the suspicions.

C. A Gospel-driven _____ (21:20b–26)

The great news was that thousands of Jews trusted in Christ (v. 20b). But what hurt Paul's reputation was that many of these believers were zealous about continuing to keep Jewish customs while the word on the street was that Paul was urging Jewish Christians who lived in Gentile communities to abandon their heritage, giving up practices like circumcision.

James's concern wasn't about *salvation*—he and Paul agreed that salvation was by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, apart from works of the law (see Acts 15; cf. 1 Cor 7:19; Gal 6:15). He wasn't concerned about what Paul was teaching the *Gentiles either*—the Jerusalem Council had agreed on what should be communicated to them (see 21:25; cf. 15:20, 29). James's concern didn't involve Paul's view of the *moral law*. Both James and Paul agreed that regenerate people should pursue holiness by walking in God's ways. The concern, rather, had to

do with *Jewish cultural practices* (Stott, *Message of Acts,* 341). Should Jewish Christians cease from following certain cultural traditions? Word had spread that Paul was teaching them to avoid customary activities. But this was untrue. He never demanded that the Jews abandon circumcision. In fact, his hurry to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost revealed that he still valued Israel's calendar (Johnson, *Let's Study Acts,* 266)…

This passage reveals the heart of this great missionary. Paul's passionate about God's glory, the unity of the church, and the evangelization of all people. He's literally willing to do anything for the sake of the gospel—as long as he doesn't compromise it. Paul offers a powerful picture of Christian liberty in this passage, showing us spiritual maturity. Paul wouldn't use his liberty to show everybody all he could do because of the freedom he enjoyed in Christ. Instead, he became a "slave to everyone" (1 Cor 9:19) like Jesus, who humbled himself, looking on the interests of others in selfless, redeeming love (cf. Phil 2:3–11).

We too should be flexible when ministering to various cultures. Some cultures are more traditional, while others are more progressive. When outside your immediate sphere, you may find it necessary to learn to adapt to the ways of another group for the sake of the gospel's spread. *Never compromise the gospel* and *never participate in sin* when you are attempting to reach people, but don't convey the impression that everyone must first be like you before they can take your invitation to accept Christ seriously. Some Christians struggle with this aspect of missionary living. But when the gospel is our main thing—when we find our identity in Christ rather than in an ethnic group, social class, or particular culture—then we will be able to minister humbly and lovingly with Pauline flexibility.

II. _____ and _____ Displayed in the Jewish Mob (21:27–36)

From its focus on humility and love, Acts 21 turns to hostility and lies. What a stark contrast between the spirit of Paul and the spirit of the Jewish crowd in verses 27–36. Some Asian Jews—probably from Ephesus (see 21:29)—recognize Paul and respond violently to him (vv. 27–28). Their wild accusations against him are designed to generate mob violence. The charges sounded like what Stephen's accusers said about him before stoning him to death (6:13–14). And the accusations are ironic given that Paul was actually undergoing a purification ritual in order to enter the temple (in Stott, *Message of Acts,* 343). Paul did teach, however, that the Messiah is the fulfillment of the law, the people, and the temple—not in a way to denigrate them but in a way to reveal their true glory as Christ himself taught (ibid.).

The Jews assumed that Paul was defiling the temple by bringing Trophimus the Ephesian (v. 29; cf. 20:4) beyond the wall that separated the court of the Gentiles from the inner sanctuary, which was off limits to Gentiles (cf. Eph 2:14). Of course, he had done no such thing. Paul knew the consequence of this violation was the death penalty.

As a result of these claims, the crowd became hostile and tried to kill Paul. Fortunately, the Roman soldiers (stationed nearby, knowing that the temple area could be a volatile place) hear the wild uproar. Lysias, the commander, had the responsibility of maintaining peace in the city,

and he proceeds to arrest Paul and put the apostle in "two chains" (v. 33), perhaps indicating that he bound him hand and foot, as Agabus predicted (v. 11). Claudius inquired about Paul and what he had done to stimulate the riot, but due to the shouts of the crowd, he couldn't discern the facts, so he ordered Paul be taken into the barracks (v. 34). When the men reached the steps of the Antonia fortress, the soldiers had to lift Paul up and carry him in order to protect him from the angry mob (v. 35). The crowd continued to chant, "Get rid of him!" (v. 36), just as an earlier crowd in Jerusalem demanded of Pontius Pilate, "Take this man away!" (Luke 23:18) and "Crucify him!" (Mark 15:13).

This ugly scene makes us wonder whether James's plan backfired. But I don't think it did. Paul didn't expect to have a pain-free experience in Jerusalem, for he knew afflictions awaited him there (cf. Acts 20:23; 21:4, 10–11). His submission to James's plan was designed to show his support to Jewish Christians who were committed to their Jewish heritage, not to escape hardship. While the immediate outcome of his actions looks like a failure, we have to take the longer view. Paul's actions would eventually put the suspicions of many Jewish Christians to rest. Further, this event would be one link in the chain of sovereign events that would deliver Paul to Rome (Johnson, *Let's Study Acts,* 268).

We must always make the right decisions in the sight of God and let things unfold as they may. Obedience to Jesus will involve hardship (2 Tim 3:12), so we shouldn't be surprised should intimidation, hate, and false accusations come our way. Many Christians have been, and will continue to be, victims of hostility and lies. Early Christians were accused of incest, cannibalism, and atheism simply because they greeted one another with a holy kiss, took the Lord's Supper, and refused to worship the emperor. Today we're accused of immorality and bigotry because of our views on marriage and life.

Conclusion/Missional Challenge

When falsely accused and persecuted, remember that the Suffering Servant is with you. Jesus stands ready to grant you grace in time of need, and he will have the last word.

Lesson 38 (10-30-22):
Paul in Jerusalem, Part 1b (Acts 21:37-22:21)

Paul Speaks to the People

37 As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, "May I say
something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek? **38** Are you not the Egyptian, then, who
recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the
wilderness?" **39** Paul replied, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg
you, permit me to speak to the people." **40** And when he had given him permission, Paul,
standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great hush,
he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying:

22 "Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you."
2 And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became
even more quiet. And he said:

3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of
Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of
you are this day. **4** I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both
men and women, **5** as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From
them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also
who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

6 "As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven
suddenly shone around me. **7** And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul,
Saul, why are you persecuting me?' **8** And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I
am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' **9** Now those who were with me saw the light
but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. **10** And I said, 'What shall I
do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all
that is appointed for you to do.' **11** And since I could not see because of the brightness of that
light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.

12 "And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who
lived there, **13** came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.'
And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. **14** And he said, 'The God of our fathers
appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth;
15 for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. **16** And now
why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

17 "When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance **18** and
saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not

accept your testimony about me.’ **19** And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. **20** And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.’ **21** And he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ ”

- Acts 21:37-22:21 ESV

In this section, Paul takes advantage of his Roman citizenship to testify to the crowd. In speaking to a hostile Jewish audience, Paul uses OT imagery as he seeks to show that his message is not an abandonment of his Jewish heritage. He explains his message via his own encounter with Jesus. His message to them is one of truth and also grace. As we will see, Paul’s words fall on deaf ears and hardened hearts.[1]

Discussion Questions

In Acts 21:37–22:22, Paul has just been beaten and narrowly escaped being killed by a mob. Soldiers are carrying him into their barracks. Paul is in a vulnerable, even helpless position. How does he manage to take command of the situation (21:37-40)?

This is Paul’s chance to do in Jerusalem what he had done in so many other places, to speak to his fellow countrymen, his beloved if misguided fellow Jews, of their own Messiah. How does Paul establish his credentials with the Jewish crowd (22:1-5)?

Imagine that you are one of the crowd hearing Paul tell the story in 22:6-11. How do you react and why?

For what three important things had God chosen Paul (see 22:14)? To what extent have you been chosen for these? How should you respond?

Why is the crowd willing to hear what Paul emphasizes about his time in Damascus and then Jerusalem in Acts 22:12-20?

Why did 22:21 make the Jews interrupt with rage?

[1] R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Acts 13–28 for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2019), 128.

In 22:1–21, why do you suppose Paul didn't defend himself against the charge of defiling the temple (see 21:28)? What was the real issue at stake?

Do you think Paul's speech was effective? Explain.

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline:
Main Idea: Paul gets attacked by a Jewish mob while participating in a vow, and then he gives a defense speech before the crowd.

III. _____ and _____ Displayed in Paul's Defense (21:37–22:21)
When Paul and the Roman soldiers reach the top of the stairs, before entering the barracks, Paul asks the tribune for permission to speak (21:37). The soldiers express surprise at Paul's proficient Greek skills. Lysias assumes Paul might be the Egyptian assassin who had stirred up a revolt recently (v. 38). According to Josephus, this false prophet presented himself as a new Moses or Joshua, gathered together thousands of followers, and lived in the desert. He predicted that Jerusalem's walls would fall like Jericho when surrounded by his men, leaving Roman forces exposed. Instead of this happening, four hundred of his rebels were killed, two hundred were captured, and the Egyptian and the rest fled (in Polhill, *Acts,* 455).

Paul informs Lysias that he is neither a terrorist nor an Egyptian but a Jew and a citizen of the honorable city of Tarsus (v. 39), one of the great university cities in the Roman world (Stott, *Message of Acts,* 347). Lysias assumed Paul was a rabble-rouser and may have associated him with an Egyptian due to Paul's shaved head. But upon learning of Paul's distinguished background, Lysias grants Paul permission to speak. Paul stands at the top of the steps, and the crowd falls silent as Paul addresses them in their own language ("Hebrew dialect" can mean Aramaic; 21:40; cf. 22:2; 26:14). In Paul's "defense" (*apologia*, 22:1), he provides a respectful and honest account of life and conversion in response to the charges made against him…

Paul had two purposes in addressing the crowd. *First, he wanted them to hear that he was loyal to his* _____. He saw himself as standing in continuity with it though he confessed Jesus as Messiah, the Righteous One foretold by the prophets.

Second, Paul wanted them to know the facts about his _____. His life and ministry weren't the result of his own imagination and wild ideas. They were the result of the sovereign, transforming grace of Jesus. Paul used this defense opportunity as an occasion to speak the good news.

His loyalty is conveyed in the careful way he addresses the crowd ("Brothers and fathers"), in his choice of language (22:2), in his mention of being raised in Jerusalem and educated under Gamaliel, in his reference to Ananias's ministry (vv. 12–16), in his reference to the "God of our fathers", and in his statement of his vision in the temple (vv. 17–20). Paul respects his Jewish heritage. The apostle's honesty is simply displayed in the telling of his testimony. We can observe it in four sections.

A. Former _____ (22:3–5)

Paul begins by identifying with the crowd, reflecting on his former life. He was born a Jew in Tarsus and had been brought up in Jerusalem. He sat at the feet of Gamaliel. He had been a strict Pharisee, indeed a Pharisee of Pharisees (Phil 3:4–7). His zeal was expressed in the violent persecution of Christians, both men and women, whom he had handed over to death (cf. 8:3; 26:10). Paul wanted to destroy Christianity. The high priest and council of elders would confirm his story (22:5). They knew that at one time Paul had even sought to travel all the way to Damascus to persecute followers of the Way.

B. Encounter with _____ (22:6–11)

But then something happened: Paul met the living Christ, and that changed everything. The light blinding Paul around noon implies it outshone the sun at its strongest time (cf. 26:13, perhaps echoing Deut 28:28–29). Paul fell to the ground and heard Jesus speaking to him. Paul includes in his defense speech that it was Jesus of *Nazareth* who confronted him. Before this Jewish audience, Paul wanted to be clear about Jesus's identity. Jesus informed Paul that he had not only been persecuting the church but also the Lord himself in his eagerness to stamp out Christianity (cf. 9:4–5; 26:14–15). This truth highlights the special relationship between Christ and the church.

Jesus didn't execute Paul on the Damascus road. Instead, he turned the terrorist into an evangelist by his amazing grace (cf. Gal 1:13–17; 1 Tim 1:12–17). Paul was commissioned, not consumed, as he would later get instructions in Damascus when meeting Ananias (cf. 9:10–17).

C. _____ (22:12–16)

Paul goes on to describe Ananias's devotion to the law, adding the note that Ananias "had a good reputation with all the Jews" (v. 12). Paul's omission of some of the story about Ananias that is recorded in Acts 9 reveals part of Paul's purpose in this defense speech. Paul wants to emphasize his respect for Israel. The person who led Paul into the Christian faith (Ananias) was himself well known for keeping God's commands.

Let's consider four parts to Paul's commission.

1. The "God of our ancestors" called Paul (22:14). This is the language God used in Moses's burning bush experience (Exod 3:15–16). The same God who commissioned Moses also commissioned Paul. In making this connection, Paul also highlights God's marvelous grace. Did Moses deserve to hear God's voice and be used to bring people into freedom? No. Did Paul

deserve such grace? Did he deserve the privilege of proclaiming liberty to the nations? No. Both men were dependent on grace.

2. God appointed Paul to see "the Righteous One" (22:14). This too is an allusion to the Old Testament, stressing the continuity between the Old Testament and the work of Jesus the Messiah. Isaiah speaks of this Righteous One as the obedient Servant who was wounded for our transgressions (Isa 53:5–6, 11; cf. Acts 3:14; 7:52). The only way for a person to be righteous is through the Righteous One—not through religious effort. Paul's life and ministry would be devoted to proclaiming this message (e.g., 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9). So then Paul is pointing out that Judaism, rightly understood, should culminate in faith in this Jesus, the Righteous One of whom Isaiah spoke.

3. God called Paul to be his "witness" to "all people" (22:15; cf. v. 21; 26:17; Gal 1:16). The man would give eyewitness testimony (1 Cor 9:1) to people of all ethnicities and social classes. He told the Corinthians that he was compelled to preach this message (1 Cor 9:16).

4. Paul received instructions on how to act on his commission. Ananias tells Paul to "get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name" (22:16). Baptism is the expression of one's faith in Jesus. Calling on the name of Jesus is a cry for salvation, rescue, cleansing, and new life. Paul became a new creation in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:21), as can anyone else who calls on the name of the Lord (Rom 10:13).

D. _____ in the temple (22:17–21)

In the last part of Paul's defense speech, he tells of the vision he had in the temple. This part of Paul's story doesn't appear in Acts 9 (cf. 9:26–30). He probably included it here in order to answer the mob's charge that he had defiled the temple. He had no interest in defiling the temple; he prayed in it.

In some ways Paul's vision sounds similar to Isaiah's vision (Isa 6:1–13), once again showing continuity between Judaism and the Christian faith. Both men were called through a vision and were commissioned (22:18–21). Both were told that people would reject their messages. Isaiah was told to stay in the city to face the rejection, but Paul was told to leave (22:18; Polhill, *Acts,* 462).

Paul describes how he protested the vision, another element common to calling narratives in the Old Testament. Paul argued he should stay in Jerusalem because while he previously persecuted Christians in Jerusalem, he was now the Lord's convincing witness (vv. 19–20). Despite the argument the Lord persisted and said, "Go, because I will send you far away to the Gentiles" (v. 21). This calling to the Gentiles wasn't merely for the sake of safety but as a matter of purpose. The Lord had raised Paul up specifically so that he would be a witness to the Gentiles (cf. 9:15–16).

With the mention of the Gentiles, the mob's suppressed emotion erupted (22:22). Paul didn't get to deal with the charges of defiling the temple. Several features stand out from Paul's defense. Let me highlight three final applications.

First, we can learn from Paul's _____. In this intense moment Paul responds with meekness, gentleness, and compassion. He doesn't respond in anger. He doesn't attack. He reasons. When you are in a pressure-filled conversation, ask the Father to calm you and give you grace to speak the message with gentleness and respect (cf. Gal 5:22–23; 2 Tim 2:24–25; Jas 4:17; 1 Pet 3:15).

Second, we can learn from Paul's _____. In the face of opposition, Paul didn't bend. He stood his ground. Such boldness also comes from God (cf. 4:29–31). Many Christians can remain calm, but that's because they cave in and fail to speak truth when pressed. We need both truth and love (cf. Eph 4:15). Only churches that love people *and* stand firmly on the gospel against the winds of culture will have anything to offer this broken world.

Third, we can learn from Paul's _____. Paul knew his assignment: proclaim the good news. That's our job too. On this particular occasion, the crowd is enraged against the apostle. On other occasions in Acts, however, people respond to his words in faith. We aren't responsible for the results of what happens when we lovingly proclaim the good news; we are responsible for sharing it.

Conclusion/Missional Challenge

While some plant the seeds of the gospel through proclamation and others water it through loving actions and deeper teaching that reinforce the message, only God gives growth (1 Cor 3:6). Sometimes people will be enraged by a presentation of the gospel; sometimes people will hear it and inquire for more information; and sometimes people will surrender to the lordship of Jesus—though they may take their time doing so. We must remember that no one is beyond the reach of God's converting grace. Just look at Paul! Just look at Paul! Just look at us! Be faithful to sow the seed and beg God to send rain to nourish it as you humbly and courageously give an answer for the hope within you.[2]

Today, many teachers of the Bible try to change the message of the gospel to make it less offensive. The gospel, however, is always offensive. In Acts 17, Paul knew he would lose many in his audience by speaking of the resurrection from the dead. Here, in Acts 21–22, Paul knew that he would elicit a strong response from the Jews by proclaiming the inclusion of Gentiles in the kingdom of God. Paul could have left out these points which caused so much hostility and mockery from the crowds. He could have avoided speaking of the resurrection from the dead as he preached at Mars Hill. He could have spoken like a "good Jew" in Jerusalem and not have mentioned the Gentiles at all. For Paul to do that, however, would have meant giving up on the

[2] Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 345.

central doctrines of the gospel and their implications. He would have been attempting to shape God to the culture, rather than summoning the culture to turn to God. The idea of conforming God to our cultural ideals remains tempting. Adapting the doctrines of the gospel to today's culture might lead to less suffering and mockery for Christians. To do that, however, would mean jettisoning the gospel and the message of salvation. If your desire for cultural relevance supersedes your theological commitment to the Christian faith, then you will not preach good news, though you might proclaim culturally popular news. Christians must know how the gospel offends the most deeply-held assumptions and values of any society, so that we are prepared to challenge the culture when the gospel does offend.[3]

[3] R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Acts 13–28 for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2019), 131–132.

Lesson 39 (11-6-22):
Paul in Jerusalem, Part 2 (Acts 22:22-23:11)

Paul and the Roman Tribune

22 Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, “Away with such
a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live.” 23 And as they were shouting and
throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, 24 the tribune ordered him to be brought
into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were
shouting against him like this. 25 But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said
to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen
and uncondemned?” 26 When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him,
“What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen.” 27 So the tribune came and said to
him, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” And he said, “Yes.” 28 The tribune answered, “I bought
this citizenship for a large sum.” Paul said, “But I am a citizen by birth.” 29 So those who were
about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he
realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.

Paul Before the Council

30 But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews,
he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought
Paul down and set him before them.

23 And looking intently at the council, Paul said, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all
good conscience up to this day.” 2 And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by
him to strike him on the mouth. 3 Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you
whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law
you order me to be struck?” 4 Those who stood by said, “Would you revile God’s high priest?”
5 And Paul said, “I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, ‘You shall
not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’ ”

6 Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out
in the council, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and
the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.” 7 And when he had said this, a dissension arose
between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 For the Sadducees
say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.
9 Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees’ party stood up and
contended sharply, “We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to
him?” 10 And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to
pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by
force and bring him into the barracks.

11 The following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.”

- Acts 22:22-23:11 ESV

Now we come to the second of Paul’s five defense speeches…In the previous chapter we observed how Paul lived out several ideas he taught in his letters. We reflected on 1 Corinthians 9, in which Paul attempted to “win Jews” (Acts 21:17–26; 1 Cor 9:20). Romans 8:28—“All things work together for the good of those who love God”—could be considered in each of these concluding chapters of Acts as we observe how God is accomplishing his sovereign purposes. In this portion of Paul’s afflictions in Jerusalem, the message of the book of 2 Corinthians comes to mind: “strength through weakness.” Paul told the Corinthians,

> *Now we have this treasure in clay jars, so that this extraordinary power may be from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed.* (2 Cor 4:7–9; cf. 2 Cor 6:3–10; 11:23–28; 12:9–12)

We indeed see Paul afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down; but he’s not crushed, driven to despair, abandoned, or destroyed. He knows Jesus is with him. This section of Acts points us to the all-sufficient grace of Jesus, who uses wounded soldiers to accomplish his mission.

We pick up the story in 22:22. After Paul mentions his ministry to the Gentiles before the Jewish mob (v. 21), the riot resumes. To say this was a tough crowd would be a massive understatement. This unwilling audience wants to kill Paul! Both their words and actions express outrage (v. 23). Paul never even gets a chance to address the accusation that he had defiled the temple (21:28). Of course, as I. Howard Marshall says, “The real issue is not whether Paul defiled the temple, but whether Judaism was prepared to tolerate Christianity” (*Acts of the Apostles,* 360). It seems it was not. Paul, thankfully, is rescued from the mob (22:24). We then see how Paul continues to respond to more trials in Jerusalem in the remainder of our selected text (22:25–23:10).

Discussion Questions

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7–12. What is your reaction to this text? How did Paul live out this passage?

What might make people of your country react as in 22:22 to an evangelist? What aspects of the gospel seem offensive or unethical to your people?

Read Acts 22:23-30. How does Paul show wisdom in this tight situation?

Not comprehending why the Jews find Paul so inflammatory, the Roman tribune arranges to bring him before the chief priests and the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court (Acts 22:30). As he stands before them in 23:1-5, how does Paul balance respect for the governing authorities with the challenges he has to offer them?

Why does Paul change the focus of attention from keeping the Law to his hope in the Resurrection?

Given the tensions between the Pharisees and the Sadducees on the issue of the resurrection, describe what you think the next few minutes of the assembly must have been like.

What effect does the split between the Pharisees and the Sadducees have on Paul's case (vv. 7-10)?

What do you think was the purpose of the promise in 23:11? What does it tell you about the Lord? Does He ever do things like this for you? Do you know why or why not?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline

Main Idea: Jesus was with Paul when he testified before the authorities, and Jesus is with us when we speak the gospel before unbelieving and unfriendly audiences.

I. Reactions (22:22–23:10)

Paul's reactions to his escalating trials intrigue me… I find I better remember Paul's reactions when I mentally note them as "paper," "rock," and "scissors."

A. "Paper"—Paul _____ his _____ (22:22–29).

After the crowd rages at Paul, expressing their desire to rip him to shreds, Lysias takes him away for examination (vv. 22–24). It appears that Lysias means to employ a "Jack Bauer" method of examination, planning to have the apostle flogged…

But just before the beating begins, Paul asks a centurion an attention-grabbing question: "Is it legal for you to scourge a man who is a Roman citizen and is uncondemned?" (v. 25). Paul

knew, of course, that it was illegal to flog a Roman citizen prior to allowing him a formal trial or sentencing (cf. 16:37). His claim of citizenship could have been verified in the public records of Tarsus (Johnson, *Let's Study Acts,* 278).

The attending centurion, knowing the danger of transgressing the law, immediately halts the plans and quickly reports the problem to the commander (22:26). Lysias is really perplexed now! He finds out that Paul is actually a Roman citizen—not just a Johnny-come-lately to citizenship, like himself, who became a citizen *by bribe*, but a man who became one *by birth* (Johnson, *Let's Study Acts,* 465)…

This marks another swing and a miss by the Roman commander. The examination ceases, and Lysias still doesn't know the truth about Paul. Added to his frustration is a sense of fear (v. 29). He will put a positive spin on his actions later (see 23:27), but at this point Lysias moves to another approach.

Paul urged Christians to submit to the governing authorities as God's ministers of justice (Rom 13:1–7), but he also expected the government to exercise its duties rightly. Paul challenged those in power to wield their authority honorably. This suggests there's a difference between humbly suffering for Christ and being a victim of injustice. We live in a land of laws, and if the laws protect us, then we should appeal to them. If these laws prevent us from following Jesus, then it's better to obey God than man (Acts 5:29).

B. "Rock"—Paul _____ the _____ (22:30–23:5).

Paul encounters more hostility as Lysias sets him before the Jewish Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin included the high priestly aristocracy and the ruling elders, who were mainly Sadducees. The minority of members were Pharisees, who were represented among the scribes (Polhill, *Acts,* 470). Paul "looked straight at" the Sanhedrin and offered his opening statement (23:1). First, he notes his own character—his actions are upright.

No sooner did Paul testify to the uprightness of his own character than did the high priest, Ananias, command those near Paul to "strike him on the mouth" (23:2; cf. John 18:22). What a bizarre interruption! One would expect a leader in the Jewish high court to display civility and justice. Ananias's response was totally unacceptable and unbiblical (see Lev 19:15), and it makes his character stand out in stark contrast to Paul's.

Why such anger and aggression? First, Ananias thought Paul a wicked man. He thought him a troublemaker. But Paul wouldn't admit to any guilt. In what he said, Paul didn't mean that he was sinless but that he lived above reproach and that he had done nothing to provoke the riot (see Acts 25:8). This claim sounded absurd to Ananias so he lost his temper. Second, Ananias was a wicked man. According to historical records, he was known for greed, a quick temper, violence, and pro-Roman sentiments.

Being struck in the face tends to raise a reaction! Paul responded to the unnecessary violence by rebuking the high priest (23:3). We can certainly sympathize with this reaction. Paul knew

the law, and he knew that Ananias's order was unjust (Lev 19:15). He therefore threw a verbal rock back at him, calling out the hypocrisy of the high priest (cf. Deut 28:22; Ezek 13:10–16; Matt 23:27), who was likely dressed in his fine religious attire. Paul's language of a "whitewashed" wall was an insult. He was saying that the priest outwardly looked clean and stable but was actually corrupt and flimsy. Paul's statement was more prophetic than he probably realized. In less than ten years, Ananias's Jewish freedom fighters would assassinate him (Polhill, *Acts,* 468).

While Paul spoke the truth, and while his cause was just, he did seem to regret speaking to the high priest in such a way, based on the manner in which he steps back from his statement in verse 5. Many correctly point out that Paul's initial heated reaction doesn't reflect the spirit of passages like 1 Corinthians 4:12: "When we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it" (cf. Matt 5:39). Jesus and Paul both condemned hypocrisy, but at the time of his trial, our Lord responded to his accusers with restraint (see Luke 22:63–71; John 18:19–23). This indicates that while we must speak out against injustice, we must always do so with respect and restraint.

The assembly was definitely provoked by Paul's words (23:4). Paul responded to their outcry, citing Exodus 22:28 (v. 5). What should we make of this statement?

The first main view is what I call the *sincerity* view. It could be that Paul genuinely didn't know he was speaking to the high priest. Maybe (1) Ananias wasn't dressed with his religious garb since this wasn't a regular meeting of the Sanhedrin; (2) Paul didn't know who gave the order because of the commotion in the meeting; (3) Paul's eyesight caused him to see only a blurry white-robed figure; or (4) because Paul had been away from Jerusalem for so long, he didn't know Ananias.

Another option is what we may call the *sarcasm* view. Perhaps in his quip, Paul was using irony, as if to say, "Brothers I see nothing priestly in this man" (Lev 19:15; Deut 25:1; Calvin, "Christ the End of the Law," 318). If that is the case, Paul is here ministering in a prophetic sense. He first offers the rebuke, and then he makes this strong statement about Ananias's character.

But I hold (lightly!) to the idea that Paul sincerely didn't know that the high priest gave the order. He sought to address people respectfully, and when he crossed the line, he admitted it. We too should pursue the proper tone with ruling authorities as we address them (Bock, *Acts,* 674–75), refusing to mimic the disrespect so rampant in our culture. And should we fail to speak as we ought, we should emulate Paul's humility.

One thing is for certain, Paul was in need of the Lord's grace. He had been beaten by a Jewish mob, almost flogged by the Romans, and at his hearing he was punched in the face by religious leaders. In spite of these many challenges, however, he was never alone.

C. "Scissors"—Paul _____ the _____ and _____ (23:6–10).
The trial takes a sharp turn when Paul, still in the middle of his speech, brings up the reason for his arrest: "the hope of the resurrection" (v. 6). His words end up "dividing and conquering."

Was Paul trying to divert attention away from himself in this move? Perhaps. But I don't think we should jump to that conclusion. Paul did indeed point out the real issue behind his trials. It was a theological dispute. His belief in Jesus's *resurrection* separated him from the rest of the Jews, and throughout his defense speeches, he constantly brings up the resurrection (cf. 24:14–16; 26:6–8; 28:20). Further, at the end of this trial Jesus commended Paul for testifying about him here in Jerusalem (23:11). So I think Paul was simply stating the facts. His belief in the risen Christ made him intolerable to many of the Jews. With that said, Paul may have anticipated the division that would follow his statement. And those who hold to the idea that Paul was thinking, *This whole trial is going nowhere, let me bring up the resurrection and show them that even they have disagreements,* may not be that far off.

Was Paul correct in calling himself a Pharisee and a son of Pharisees? Well, he was in fact educated in the pharisaic tradition (cf. 22:3; Phil 3:5). His assertion doesn't have to be taken as a claim that his literal father was a Pharisee. And he wasn't necessarily claiming to endorse everything the Pharisees taught, but with respect to their eschatological hope revealed in Scripture (cf. Ezek 37:1–14; Dan 12:1–3), he still identified with them. Jesus was the fulfillment of that hope.

The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection. Nor did they embrace the existence of *angels*, nor the *spirit*—a fact probably referring to the eschatology of the Pharisees. But the Pharisees embraced these ideas (23:8). The Sadducees only recognized the books of Moses as authoritative, and they argued that such ideas weren't found there. Jesus, however, showed them on one occasion that denying the resurrection contradicted God's covenant faithfulness to the patriarchs (Luke 20:27–39; Johnson, *Let's Study Acts,* 283). The Pharisees believed the resurrection was Israel's ultimate hope. Paul knew what these groups believed. He identified with the Pharisees, essentially saying that Jesus is the fulfillment of their shared hope.

The effect of the theological controversy was sharp division. The Pharisees actually defended Paul in this case! As the apostle's story unfolds, others will make the same conclusion about Paul's innocence (e.g., 23:29; 25:25–27; 26:32). But here the shouting soon turned to violence, and Lysias once again had to intervene and rescue Paul, delivering him back to the barracks. Still the commander lacked the answers he desired. The resurrection remains central to the Christian faith. Paul said, "If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation is in vain, and so is your faith" (1 Cor 15:14). We must keep heralding the good news of the empty tomb, and we should expect various responses to it.

Once Paul is back in the barracks, left to nurse his wounds and ponder what just happened, the Lord Jesus appears to the discouraged apostle. Having appeared to him in Corinth previously, he now shows up in Jerusalem to comfort and energize Paul for his upcoming trip to Rome.

II. Reassurance (23:11)

We can only speculate what was going on in the apostle's mind before Jesus comforted him, but surely we can assume Paul was at a low point in his life. The Lord often appeared to Paul with encouragement and guidance in important moments in his career (cf. 16:9; 18:9–10; 22:17, 21; 27:23–24). Paul had found an unsupportive church in Jerusalem. He had suffered physically and emotionally before rulers and crowds. And he may have questioned or regretted some of his actions. He was in need of the Lord's grace. That's just what he received.

While Jesus's words here were specifically for Paul in this moment, we still find in them reassuring application for our lives. Jesus told Paul that he must go on to testify about him in Rome as he did in Jerusalem. That was a reminder that Paul's task wasn't mainly to defend himself; he was to testify about Jesus. We too are commanded to testify to the gospel in front of unbelieving and sometimes unfriendly audiences. Here, then, are four encouragements.

A. The Lord _____ us. Jesus knew Paul's situation and condition, and he knows what we face, too. We are never outside his gaze. Jesus knows his sheep by name and by need (John 10:14).

B. The Lord _____ us. Jesus's presence comforted Paul (cf. 18:9–10). While Paul felt alone, the reality is that Jesus was with him (cf. 2 Tim 4:17–18). Jesus stood for Paul at the cross; here he stands with Paul in the barracks. Be encouraged: the Lord will never leave you or forsake you (Heb 13:5).

C. The Lord _____ us. The Lord displays his support of Paul in two ways. First, the Lord gave him an exhortation: "Have courage!"…Second, the Lord gave Paul a commendation: "You have testified about me in Jerusalem." What an encouragement to hear the Lord, your Savior and hero, say, "You did it. You told people about Me!"

D. The Lord _____ us. Paul may have wondered if he would make it to Rome. But in telling Paul it was "necessary" that he testify there, the sovereign Lord let the apostle know that he would make sure he arrived. Though Paul would encounter many trials en route, he could face everything that happened to him over the course of the next weeks knowing that the Lord's purposes would prevail. Jesus wasn't finished with Paul. The prospect of future service must have been a great encouragement to the war-weary apostle.

All this good news—that Jesus knows us, is with us, is for us, and isn't finished with us—leads me to ask a question: How should we expect to experience the reassuring comfort of Jesus if we don't experience visions like Paul's?

Conclusion/Missional Challenge
At the end of his trials, we're reminded where to find the *strength* to speak before unbelieving and unfriendly audiences. It's one thing to know what to say about Jesus and how to say it, but there's also the challenge of finding the strength and encouragement to proclaim it. In this passage we see that the same Jesus who stood for Paul at the cross now stands by Paul in his trials (23:11). We too need this encouragement. Jesus stood for us, and he now stands with us. The Jesus who was with Paul when he testified before the authorities is the same Jesus who stands with us when we speak the gospel before hostile audiences.

Let me remind you that the Lord still speaks to us by his Spirit, through the *Christ-centered Scriptures*. Jesus meets us in his Word. By marinating our thoughts and hearts in the gospel, we find great strength. So don't neglect the Scriptures. John Calvin wrote, "This is the whole of what we should seek in the Scriptures: to be well acquainted with Jesus Christ, and the infinite riches which are contained in Him; and which are, by Him, offered to us from God His Father" ("Christ the End").

The Pharisees had a category for resurrection but failed to rely on Jesus, who is himself the "resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). Let your study of Scripture lead you to the hero of Scripture (John 5:39–40, 46).

Lesson 40 (11-13-22):
Paul in Caesarea, Part 1 (Acts 23:12-24:27)

A Plot to Kill Paul

12 When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor
drink till they had killed Paul. **13** There were more than forty who made this conspiracy. **14** They
went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to
taste no food till we have killed Paul. **15** Now therefore you, along with the council, give notice
to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more
exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near."

16 Now the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, so he went and entered the barracks and
told Paul. **17** Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the tribune, for
he has something to tell him." **18** So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, "Paul
the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to
say to you." **19** The tribune took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, "What is
it that you have to tell me?" **20** And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul
down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely
about him. **21** But do not be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in
ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have
killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for your consent." **22** So the tribune dismissed the
young man, charging him, "Tell no one that you have informed me of these things."

Paul Sent to Felix the Governor

23 Then he called two of the centurions and said, "Get ready two hundred soldiers, with seventy
horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night.
24 Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor." **25** And he
wrote a letter to this effect:

26 "Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings. **27** This man was seized by the
Jews and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued
him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen. **28** And desiring to know the charge for which
they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. **29** I found that he was being
accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or
imprisonment. **30** And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I
sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against
him."

31 So the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to
Antipatris. **32** And on the next day they returned to the barracks, letting the horsemen go on
with him. **33** When they had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they

presented Paul also before him. [34] On reading the letter, he asked what province he was from. And when he learned that he was from Cilicia, [35] he said, “I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive.” And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod’s praetorium.

Paul Before Felix at Caesarea

24 And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul. [2] And when he had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying:

“Since through you we enjoy much peace, and since by your foresight, most excellent Felix, reforms are being made for this nation, [3] in every way and everywhere we accept this with all gratitude. [4] But, to detain you no further, I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly. [5] For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. [6] He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. [8] By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him.”

[9] The Jews also joined in the charge, affirming that all these things were so.

[10] And when the governor had nodded to him to speak, Paul replied:

“Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense. [11] You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem, [12] and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. [13] Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me. [14] But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, [15] having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. [16] So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. [17] Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. [18] While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia— [19] they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me. [20] Or else let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, [21] other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: ‘It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.’ ”

Paul Kept in Custody

[22] But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, “When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case.” [23] Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.

[24] After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. [25] And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, “Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.” [26] At the same time he hoped that money would be

given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him. **27** When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

- Acts 23:12-24:27 ESV

These two chapters have much to teach Christians who are seeking first the kingdom of God. One of the most obvious truths is that we can keep calm because God is in control—even when we're witnessing in stressful situations.

Paul finds himself in some stressful situations in Acts 23–24. We tend to like watching suspenseful shows on television while preferring not to encounter suspense in real life. In this passage Paul is first the object of a terrorist attack, and then he's a defendant in a tense court case that looks unwinnable. John Stott said Paul's chances of surviving the attacks of the angry Jews and mighty Romans resemble that of a butterfly before a steamroller (*Message of Acts,* 358)! Yet the apostle remains calm and courageous, submitting to the sovereign plan and power of God…

What happens when you imagine the future? Does it stress you out? Could it be that you find it easier to affirm the sovereignty of God *theoretically* rather than resting in the sovereignty of God *experientially*? This passage shows us that we can rest the whole weight of our concerns on God our Father, who holds the whole world in his hands.[1]

Discussion Questions

How do you explain the fierce determination of these Jews to kill Paul (See Rom. 10:2)? Why do they think he is so dangerous?

Consider the lengths to which the Jewish fanatics were willing to go to silence Paul (see 23:12–15). What human and divine factors prevented them (see 23:16–30)?

In what ways is Claudius Lysias being very politically savvy in his letter to Felix (23:26-30)?

Compare Paul's introduction (see 24:10) to Tertullus's (see 24:2–3). How are they different, and why?

[1] Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 356–357.

How did Paul refute each of Tertullus's charges against him?

making trouble, inciting dissension (see 24:11–13, 17–18):

leading a new and unlawful sect (see 24:14–16):

desecrating the temple (see 24:11–13, 17–21):

Why was it so important to Paul to keep a clear conscience before God and man (see 23:1; 24:16)? Is this important to you? If so, why? How do you show it?

What does Paul's life teach about living as law-abiding citizens?

Why is it important to us that Paul claimed Christianity was not something new, but the true continuation of the faith recorded in the Law and the Prophets?

How did his expectation of resurrection and possible judgment affect Paul (see 24:15–16)? How did this idea affect Felix (see 24:25)? Why do you think the prospect of judgment affected these men so differently?

In times when it seems everything is on hold and nothing positive is happening, how can Paul's experience be of practical help for you?

Why does Paul constantly bring up the resurrection? What does this teach about our gospel conversations?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline

Main Idea: This portion of the narrative demonstrates the sovereignty of God and the character of a faithful Christian witness.

I. God Is _____ Even When We're Going through _____ (23:12–35).
The names of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit aren't mentioned in these verses—it's a notable absence that reminds me of the book of Esther. In that book, too, the name of God is missing, but his fingerprints are everywhere within the story. God works in various ways to accomplish his purposes, even when we can't see him. In this passage the same Lord who promised that Paul would get to Rome works through people and circumstances to accomplish his agenda (cf. v. 11). We sometimes think God isn't working when we don't see visible signs of his sovereignty. But never mistake the lack of the spectacular for the inactivity of God. His quiet, invisible hand is always at work.

A. God uses an unnamed nephew to _____ (23:12–22).
The day after Jesus reassured Paul in the barracks, more than forty angry Jews hatched a plot to kill him (vv. 12–13; cf. 9:24; 20:19). Their oath not to eat or drink until they had murdered the apostle meant they intended to act quickly. They approached the chief priests and elders (avoiding the minority Pharisees, who had defended Paul) and told them of their plan. The Sanhedrin, apparently cooperating, agreed to act as if they were reconvening to discuss Paul's crimes. The plan meant that as Paul approached the meeting, the assassins would intercept and execute him. So much for justice and law within the Sanhedrin (Gangel, *Acts,* 390)! These terrorists, like many modern-day terrorists, would stop at nothing to achieve their selfish, religious goals. Such an evil plan would appeal to Ananias the high priest, who was known for such violence. God, however, would thwart the scheme.

God uses a young man to do it. John Polhill says it's anyone's guess how old the nephew featured in this passage was, but perhaps he was in his late teens (*Acts,* 472). In light of how Lysias takes him "by the hand" in verse 19, he may be just a little boy (Schreiner, "Living as Disciples"). Regardless, this unnamed nephew becomes an incredibly important advocate, one clearly raised up for "for such a time as this" (Esth 4:14). This is the only mention of Paul's family found anywhere in the New Testament. We get the impression from his writings that he lost connection with them after his conversion (cf. Phil 3:8), but here we learn that he had a sister and a nephew. We aren't sure how the nephew was able to hear of the plan. Perhaps the zealots underestimated him and were just speaking freely in front of him (Schreiner, "Living as Disciples").

Marvel at the sovereignty of God here. The Lord often uses little things and even little children to accomplish his great purposes. This story illustrates the seamless integration between God's sovereign agenda and human decisions made by responsible people (Johnson, *Let's Study Acts,* 288). The Lord already promised Paul that he would get to Rome, but God would preserve Paul through the actions of individuals. The nephew hears of the conspiracy. He relates it to Paul. Paul acts wisely. The Roman centurion does his job. And Lysias acts to protect Paul. There are no burning bushes involved in Paul's rescue. No light shows. Paul's life is spared as a result of people doing what's in front of them. God uses their actions to accomplish his purposes.

B. God uses Lysias to _____ (23:23–30).

Lysias immediately responds to the threat when he hears about it. He makes plans to transfer Paul to Caesarea…To protect Paul, Lysias summoned the centurion to prepare two hundred infantrymen, seventy mounted soldiers, and two hundred "spearmen" (v. 23). This action is a reminder that God can even use secular governments to achieve his purposes. We see God's rule over the affairs of people and nations throughout the Scriptures. He turns the hearts of rulers and kings (cf. Prov 21:1).

In order to bring the governor, Felix, up to speed on the situation, Lysias wrote a brief letter to him (vv. 26–30). Here again we see how the Lord used Lysias to protect Paul as Lysias testifies to Paul's innocence…In his letter Lysias calls Felix "most excellent," but many would deny any excellence in Felix. Lysias also tries to paint himself as a top-notch soldier. He implies that his first rescue of Paul was motivated by his commitment to defend a Roman citizen, but the fact is, Lysias thought Paul was an Egyptian revolutionary. He also conveniently omits that he nearly had a Roman citizen flogged illegally.

The most important statement in the letter is the claim of Paul's innocence. The problem involving him revolved around theology; it didn't warrant death or imprisonment. In including this note here, Luke once again weaves this theme into Acts: Christians aren't dangerous law-breakers (Schreiner, "Living as Disciples")…Some people claimed that the early Christians were criminals (Schreiner, "Living as Disciples")…But the four Gospel writers go to great pains to say that Jesus was innocent (cf. Mark 14:55). Even Pilate recognized it (Mark 15:14–15). So here is another parallel between Paul's trials and those of the Savior.

The application for us is simple: Christians should be honorable citizens. We shouldn't be ruthless pragmatists, breaking laws for the sake of our causes and claiming we are acting in the name of God. When the laws of the land don't hinder us from living out our faith, then we should abide by the rule of law as model citizens.

C. God uses a Roman army to _____ (23:31–35).

The soldiers take Paul to Antipatris the next morning by the cover of night. The seventy horsemen then ride onward with Paul to Caesarea. Though they assumed they were moving a prisoner, God was transporting his preacher safely. Even though ruthless Felix was corrupt and incompetent (as Paul's case will illustrate and as history records), he at least begins the right way. He promises to hear Paul's case as soon as the accusers arrive from Jerusalem, sending the apostle away to be held by Herod's praetorian guard (v. 34).

So the nephew thwarts the plan. Lysias reports the plan. Soldiers transport the prisoner. And all of this occurs under the sovereign rule of the King. Kenneth Gangel comments, "Sometimes God delivers his children by the simple word of a young relative. Sometimes he has to call in the cavalry. At all times, he is ultimately in charge" (*Acts,* 391). God has an infinite number of options for working out his will in our lives. While our daily lives may not look spectacular, we can be assured that God is involved in the affairs of his people. Paul says, "I am sure of this, that

he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6). Trust him even in difficult circumstances! Thank him for his care and provision.

II. We Can Be _____ Even in _____ (24:1–27).
In chapter 24 we read of a typical court procedure; it includes the filing of charges, the prosecution of the plaintiff's spokesman, and the answer from the defendant (Johnson, *Let's Study Acts,* 293). After hearing the arguments the judge normally rendered a verdict. But this case has some unique twists to it because of the nature of the alleged crime, the defendant, and the judge. This story reminds us of some basic truths about being faithful witnesses.

A. Enemies of the gospel will _____ (24:1–9).
Paul's accusers were serious. They brought in an attorney, a professional orator named Tertullus, to prosecute him. Flattery is practically dripping from Tertullus's lips as he attempts to make a favorable first impression on the judge. Tertullus expresses gratitude for the "great peace" brought about by Felix, but the fact was, Felix's reign had been marked by constant unrest and fights between imperial forces and the oppressed Jews and Samaritans. Nevertheless, because peace was a major Roman value, the skilled attorney commends Felix for bringing it. Tertullus strikes this topic of peace again as he brings up the first of four charges against Paul.

First, he accuses Paul of being a _____. He calls him a pestilent fellow, a public nuisance, a "plague" (v. 5). His point is that Paul "infects" people (cf. 17:6–7).

Second, Tertullus contends that Paul is a _____. That is, he stirs up riots. There was a grain of truth to this statement. Paul's ministry often resulted in riots, although that wasn't Paul's intent. In actuality, the enemies of the gospel instigated the riots (see 13:50; 14:2, 5, 19; 16:22; 17:5, 13; 19:23–29, 37–40).

Third, Tertullus calls Paul _____. This is the only place where the term "Nazarenes" is used to describe Christians (Marshall, *Acts of the Apostles,* 375). It's possible that Jewish Christians were given this nickname—especially since the word contained a condescending implication (ibid.), as illustrated by Nathaniel's question regarding Jesus: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46).

Finally, Tertullus makes a specific charge: Paul was _____ (v. 6). This charge of profaning the temple, however, was false. Tertullus also claims that Paul's attempt to desecrate the temple was frustrated by the Jews. In a sentence, then, Tertullus charges, "Paul disturbs the peace as a seditious member of a dangerous sect" (Bock, *Acts,* 691).

Those who oppose Christ will go to great lengths to oppose the kingdom. They will use skill, political maneuvering, and lies. Such opposition shouldn't surprise us. We should be prepared spiritually for such attacks (cf. Eph 6:1–10).

B. Faithful witnesses of the gospel _____ (24:10–27).

In verses 10–21 Paul speaks for the defense. He seizes this opportunity to give a **public witness** not only of his innocence but also of the gospel (cf. 9:15). He states that Christianity isn't a threat to Rome or any state (Bock, *Acts,* 697). And he shows that this "new movement" is rooted in the "old promises" of the Scriptures (cf. 13:15; 22:3; 28:17, 23)…Paul's public witness has three parts.

1) *A Clear _____ Record (24:11–16).* Paul goes straight to the specific charges and brings up that he has only been in Jerusalem for twelve days. It's difficult to start a riot in less than two weeks! Believing in a future heavenly judgment, Paul then says he takes pains to have a "clear conscience toward God and men" (v. 16). So Paul not only claims to be innocent, but he also claims to have a faith that is in accord with the fundamental outlook of Judaism—with a belief in God, with the Scriptures, with future judgment, and with the importance of holiness.

2) *Blameless _____ Behavior (24:17–20).* In verse 17 Paul returns to the issue about defiling the temple. He gives his version of the story. He first tells Felix that he brought "charitable gifts" to Jerusalem. We have mentioned this gift from the Gentile churches a number of times, and it is mentioned in Paul's letters (cf. Rom 15:25–33; 1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8–9). Paul devoted a lot of time and effort to this collection. He also adds that he presented "offerings" while at the temple, alluding to the payments Paul made on behalf of four men (21:23–26). Paul continues to describe how, when he was engaging in this activity at the temple, he was discovered by his opponents. He starts off mentioning "some Jews from Asia." These accusers were conspicuously absent from the trial, however. While these men should have been the ones to bring the charges against Paul, they had no case! Paul was confident that no criminal charges could be made against him.

3) *Personal Message: _____! (24:21).* Paul had a wonderful ability to bring up the resurrection of Jesus in all sorts of contexts. The resurrection is indeed a central doctrine to the Christian faith that shows the sufficiency of Christ's death, the supremacy of his lordship, and his inevitable return as Judge. We do well to follow Paul's example of funneling conversations to this life-changing, world-altering event.

How did Felix respond to Paul's sermon? Sadly, not with repentance of sin and placing faith in Jesus. He rejected the message (v. 25). Felix was convicted by what he had heard but not changed. More greedy than interested in God, Felix would continue to summon Paul over the coming weeks in hopes that the apostle would offer him a bribe (v. 26). Felix should have released Paul, but that would have upset the Jews—something he had done too frequently during his rule (Gangel, *Acts,* 406). As a side note, many believe Paul and Luke used Paul's detainment in Caesarea as an opportunity to gather information for writings, perhaps the books of Luke and Acts (ibid.).

So at the end of chapter 24, we see yet another illustration that God is in control—even when we're going through trials. If you find yourself in a perplexing season, take comfort here: God hasn't forgotten you. Paul sat in this prison for two years! The Old Testament saint Joseph can

also testify to God's faithfulness in a similar situation. Our Lord is sovereign, and we can and should trust him—even when we're perplexed (cf. Gen 50:20). We live by faith, not by sight, until we get home (2 Cor 5:7).

Conclusion/Missional Challenge

Acts presents its readers with spectacular stories of conversions and repentance. Who can forget the turning of Saul to Jesus? How could the conversion of Cornelius pass away from memory into the recesses of history? The Philippian jailer fell before Paul and cried out for salvation. Acts demonstrates the power of the gospel to turn hearts of stone into hearts of flesh.

But at the same time, the Scriptures present this real and unembellished story of Felix's rejection of the gospel as a sobering reminder that those spectacular stories are not inevitable, or even the norm, when the gospel is preached. Luke is teaching us three significant things. First, Christians must unabashedly preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church stands upon the witness and testimony of the gospel's power to raise the dead to life. The preacher in the pulpit stands not in his own strength but ascends the steps (as it were) on the sure foundation of God's word. The Christian preaches and proclaims the gospel; it is God who saves. Second, preaching the gospel also means preaching conversion and a turning away from sin. Without repentance, the gospel is turned into a message of cheap grace. Obedience to God flows from a heart transformed by the gospel. Christian preaching is only Christian when it summons the dead to newness of life. Paul's message of righteousness and self-control challenged Felix and Drusilla because they lived entrenched in sin and disobedience—but the challenge needed to be made. Finally, rejecting the gospel by refusing to repent does not make it untrue. Rejecting the gospel and banishing the thought of judgment to the outer rim of your mind will not stop the coming day when Jesus Christ judges the whole earth. Judgment approaches. It will come swiftly. It will come unannounced. Will you be ready when the trumpets sound? And will you share the gospel until that time, undeterred by those who reject the message and cling to their sin?[2]

[2] R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Acts 13–28 for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2019), 150–151.

Lesson 41 (11-20-22):
Paul in Caesarea, Part 2a (Acts 25:1-27)

Paul Appeals to Caesar

25 Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from
Caesarea. **2** And the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against
Paul, and they urged him, **3** asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem—
because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way. **4** Festus replied that Paul was
being kept at Caesarea and that he himself intended to go there shortly. **5** "So," said he, "let the
men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man,
let them bring charges against him."

6 After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And
the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. **7** When he had
arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and
serious charges against him that they could not prove. **8** Paul argued in his defense, "Neither
against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any
offense." **9** But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Do you wish to go up to
Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?" **10** But Paul said, "I am standing
before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you
yourself know very well. **11** If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I
deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me,
no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar." **12** Then Festus, when he had conferred with
his council, answered, "To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go."

Paul Before Agrippa and Bernice

13 Now when some days had passed, Agrippa the king and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and
greeted Festus. **14** And as they stayed there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king,
saying, "There is a man left prisoner by Felix, **15** and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests
and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of
condemnation against him. **16** I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to
give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make
his defense concerning the charge laid against him. **17** So when they came together here, I made
no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought.
18 When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed.
19 Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a
certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. **20** Being at a loss how to
investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there
regarding them. **21** But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the
emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar." **22** Then Agrippa said to
Festus, "I would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," said he, "you will hear him."

23 So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. **24** And Festus said, "King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. **25** But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. **26** But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. **27** For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him."

- Acts 25:1-27 ESV

Here we come to the final defense speeches of Paul. In them we see God's faithfulness to his purposes (cf. 23:11) and Paul's faithfulness to testify to the gospel. The apostle has addressed the crowd in Jerusalem (22:1–21), the Jewish Council in Jerusalem (23:1–6), and the Roman governor, Felix, in Caesarea (24:1–21). He will now briefly address "the new Felix," named "Festus" (25:6–12). This sets the stage for Paul's final address to Agrippa II.[1]

In Acts 25, Luke never mentions the name of God. The hand of God, however, runs throughout the entire narrative. His providential hand orchestrates every event in this chapter. He protects his servant Paul and sets the apostle on a trajectory toward proclaiming the gospel before the most powerful and influential people in the empire. God may seem absent; indeed, it may even seem that God has abandoned Paul. His grace, however, continues to empower Paul and give him the wisdom and strength to meet his adversaries with poise, peace, and conviction. The promise of God to Paul in 23:11 directs and undergirds the entire narrative. God's promises will never fail.[2]

Discussion Questions

Paul has been in custody in Caesarea, out of the Jewish leaders' sight, for two years (Acts 24:27). Why hasn't the opposition to Paul by the Jewish leaders dissipated during the time?

What new threat to Paul do the Jewish leaders plan as soon as the new governor Festus arrives, and how is it thwarted (25:1-6)?

What does Paul apparently hope to accomplish by appealing to Caesar?

---

[1] Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 366–367.

[2] R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Acts 13–28 for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2019), 153.

It is fascinating to see Paul and his beliefs and preaching through the eyes of a Roman official. Festus's summary shows how the Christian faith appeared to one pagan outsider. How is Paul's case explained to Agrippa from Festus's point of view (25:13-27)?

How do you think nonbelievers misunderstand your Christian beliefs?

This Agrippa was the son of the Herod in 12:1-23. Why would he be especially interested in hearing from Paul?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline
Main Idea: Paul's speech before Festus sets the stage for Paul's final defense before Agrippa; from the latter we can learn to live as faithful witnesses.

I. Paul Before Festus (25:1–27)

A. Festus _____ the Jewish leaders' request (25:1–5).
Festus replaces Felix as governor of Judea and attempts to bring closure to this unresolved case. Not much is known about Festus, who only served in this position for two years before dying in office. He seems to be more just and moderate than his predecessor, Felix, who was fired by Nero.

Don't miss that Paul is still serving the Lord Jesus when Felix drops out of the telling and isn't mentioned again. Mary sang about how the Lord scatters the proud, brings down the mighty from their thrones, and exalts those of humble estate (cf. Luke 1:51–52). We should take heart in God's sovereign lordship. Though God's providence sometimes appears to be inefficient (Thomas, *Acts,* 675), his ways aren't our ways (Isa 55:8–9). Later, Paul would reflect on God's sovereignty from a Roman prison cell, telling the Philippians that through his imprisonment the gospel was reaching people it would otherwise not have reached, and other Christians were being encouraged to greater boldness (Phil 1:12–14). Faithfully serve the Lord Jesus and keep trusting in him to work even when you can't see what he's doing.

Festus plunged into his work immediately. Three days after reaching Caesarea, he makes a courtesy visit to Jerusalem to meet with the leaders in person. Certain Jews' feelings toward Paul haven't changed in the past two years. Some still want to kill Paul. They ask Festus to send Paul to Jerusalem to be tried, but they plan to ambush the apostle on the road. Festus,

however, won't be the Jews' puppet—at least initially. He wants things done decently and in order.

B. Festus _____ Paul's _____ (25:6–12).

After returning to Caesarea, Festus takes his seat on the bench and makes Paul face the accusers. This time they add some physical intimidation as they stand "around him" (v. 7) while bringing the charges. Paul simply denies the accusations, and for the first time he mentions that he hasn't offended Caesar. Festus could close the case at this point, but instead he plays politics. Festus, "wanting to do the Jews a favor," asks Paul if he's willing to change the venue (v. 9; cf. 24:27). He may have assumed that he would get more clarity on the situation in Jerusalem and clearly still plans to preside over the trial rather than putting it in the hands of the Sanhedrin.

Paul wants to silence all discussion about a possible return to Jerusalem. He strongly replies, insisting that the trumped-up charges are nonsense and Festus knows it (v. 10). Paul adds that he's not afraid to die, but a death sentence must come from Roman court, not from angry Jewish leaders in Jerusalem (v. 11). Knowing that his only hope of justice involves traveling to Rome, he makes use of his citizen's right of appeal to Caesar (cf. 25:21, 25–26; 26:32; 28:19).

Festus is in a tight spot now. He can't set Paul free, for that would offend the Jews. But he can't convict and sentence Paul, for that would offend Roman law (Stott, *Message of Acts,* 367). So, after consulting his advisors, he grants the appeal (v. 12). The Caesar in view here was Nero, who reigned from AD 54 to 68. His latter reign degenerated into immoderation, weird behavior, and violence—especially against Christians—but his earlier reign seems to have been more stable (Polhill, *Acts,* 492). At this point in history, his notoriously bad behavior had not yet appeared.

Most significant to understanding this portion of Scripture is that in making his appeal, Paul would travel to *Rome* to bear witness (cf. 19:21; 23:11). Through Paul's many dangers, toils, and snares, God is working out his purposes for his apostle.

C. Festus _____ Agrippa's _____ (25:13–22).

Herod Agrippa II (AD 27–100), whom I. Howard Marshall calls "a petty king" (*Acts of the Apostles,* 387), and his sister pay a courtesy visit to the new governor not long after Paul's appeal. This gave Festus the opportunity to get advice on the matter. He knew Agrippa was familiar with imperial politics and Jewish disputes. He was the great-grandson of Herod the Great and the son of Herod Agrippa I. His father had killed James and arrested Peter, both Christian leaders, but was then killed under God's judgment (Acts 12). The Romans had given Agrippa II various territories in northeast Palestine to rule over, and he ruled over them with the status of a king (ibid., 387)…

Agrippa ruled mainly over the Gentile population. He never reigned over the main Jewish territory of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee as his father had (Polhill, *Acts,* 492). The Romans did give him custody of the ceremonial vestments worn by the priests on the Day of Atonement.

Claudius also gave him the right to appoint high priests for the Jerusalem temple (ibid., 492–93).

Festus reports a Roman version of the case against Paul to Agrippa. He basically echoes Gallio (18:12–15) and Lysias (23:29). The Jews' dispute with Paul was about *theology*. It revolved around Paul's interpretation of the Old Testament and the claim that Jesus was the risen Messiah. I. Howard Marshall notes how everything has now drifted to the subject of the resurrection. "It is interesting that by this stage the question of Paul's alleged desecration of the temple has quite disappeared from sight, and the topic of the resurrection (23:6; 24:21) has replaced it," he says (*Acts of the Apostles,* 388). Festus doesn't understand the resurrection debate (cf. 26:4). His statement shows how incomprehensible such a belief was to a pagan (Polhill, *Acts,* 494). He sees this issue as an internal Jewish discussion, not a matter of Roman law (ibid.).

One can't miss the parallels to Jesus's case here. Both Paul and Jesus were prosecuted before a Roman governor (Pilate/Festus) and then brought before a Jewish king (Herod Antipas/Herod Agrippa II; see Luke 23:6–12). Both Paul and Jesus were found to be innocent (see Luke 23:4, 13–16, 22). But Jesus would die at the hand of Pilate, and Paul would be sent to Rome for further trial. Paul, whether he realizes it or not, is walking in the footsteps of Jesus. Festus concluded by bringing Agrippa up to speed on Paul's appeal to Caesar (v. 21). Agrippa, like his great uncle, Herod Antipas in Luke 23:8, was curious about the matter. Festus assured Agrippa that he would hear from Paul the next day.

D. Festus _____ Paul to Agrippa and the _____ (25:23–27).

The next morning, in spite of having just a day's notice, Festus, Bernice, and Agrippa were able to pull off a grand public event filled with "great pomp" (v. 23, Greek *fantasia,* our "fantasy") during which Paul would be heard. Each knew how to put on appearances. Luke mentions the many dignitaries in attendance, who would have been predominately Gentile (Johnson, *Let's Study Acts,* 307). Paul is summoned to enter when the event reaches its climax.

Festus speaks with great rhetorical exaggeration, claiming that the "whole" Jewish community was shouting for Paul's execution, but being a just governor, he delivered Paul. Festus then absolves himself from further responsibility by mentioning Paul's appeal. Finally, Festus sets the agenda. He has assembled this group of people to assist him in writing up charges against Paul. Of course, he had none to write at this point because he knew Paul was innocent.

Jesus originally promised Paul that he would testify before Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel (9:15). Jesus had also previously warned his disciples that they would be brought before kings and governors, but he assured them that he would give them words of wisdom to speak (Luke 21:12–15; 2 Cor 5:20) in order to make them bold witnesses. In the following paragraphs we see that the Lord Jesus was faithful to his word. Understand that Festus and Agrippa could decide absolutely nothing about the outcome for Paul. He had appealed to Caesar. In their view these two authorities had assembled to gather information and put on a show. But what was really happening was that the Lord Jesus was accomplishing his agenda in Paul's life. His

testimony before Agrippa is gripping. When you give a defense of the gospel, the Lord Jesus is with you. Rely on him as you make the good news known.

Conclusion/Missional Challenge

This first part of Acts 25 continues to reveal the folly of the hard-hearted Jews who continue to oppose the message of the Messiah. The narrative also, in an inconspicuous way, glories in the providence of God. As Paul stood on trial, he continued to trust in God and believe in his sovereign plan. Today, as Christians, we will meet opposition and persecution, and face accusations. We will stand trial in the cultural courts of modernity and postmodernism. The high priests of the moral revolution will charge us with heresy and sedition. They will indict us for holding antiquated beliefs which oppose the new post-Christian status quo. Indeed, Western culture views Christian dogma as diametrically opposed to its vision of progress. The question, therefore, is this: are we, as God's people, willing to give an answer for the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15)?

Paul's exemplary character serves as an encouragement to each generation of Christians. He knew the hope of the crucified and resurrected Christ, even as it seemingly stirred up hatred or confusion in those around him. The gospel of Jesus Christ is no less a scandal today than it was during Paul's imprisonment—a beautiful scandal that ought to be shared with unabashed passion, whatever the consequences. For from this gospel comes an incomparable gift.[3]

[3] R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Acts 13–28 for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2019), 165.

Lesson 42 (11-27-22):
Paul in Caesarea, Part 2b (Acts 26:1-32)

Paul's Defense Before Agrippa

26 So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched
out his hand and made his defense: **2** "I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King
Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews,
3 especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews.
Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

4 "My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in
Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. **5** They have known for a long time, if they are willing to
testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. **6** And now I
stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, **7** to which
our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I
am accused by Jews, O king! **8** Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the
dead?

9 "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of
Nazareth. **10** And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after
receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote
against them. **11** And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them
blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

Paul Tells of His Conversion

12 "In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief
priests. **13** At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that
shone around me and those who journeyed with me. **14** And when we had all fallen to the
ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you
persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' **15** And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?'
And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. **16** But rise and stand upon your feet,
for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the
things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, **17** delivering you
from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you **18** to open their eyes, so
that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may
receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

19 "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, **20** but declared first
to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the
Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their
repentance. **21** For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. **22** To this
day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and

great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: **23** that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles."

24 And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind." **25** But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. **26** For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. **27** King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe." **28** And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?" **29** And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains."

30 Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. **31** And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment." **32** And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

- Acts 26:1-32 ESV

This speech before Agrippa is powerful, gospel filled, inspiring, and exemplary. It gives important insights into bearing testimony to Jesus Christ. Remember, Paul's general task is the same as ours: articulating the good news about the risen Messiah and calling people to trust in him. Darrell Bock says Paul shows himself to be "the exemplary witness who calls for a response" (*Acts,* 706). Jesus has *saved* us and *sent* us, like Paul, into the world to give the good news (Matt 28:18–20). Salvation doesn't stop with us. God saved us so we would tell the world about the One who opens eyes, brings people out of darkness into the light, forgives sin, and gives strangers an inheritance (26:18). As we observe how Paul speaks to Agrippa and as we hear afresh Paul's commission, we can make some important applications for how to be Great Commission Christians.

Acts 26 has several transferable principles for modern-day witnesses. The chapter opens on a hearing designed to give King Agrippa insight into Paul's case in order that he might advise Governor Festus about what should be included in his report to Caesar (25:26–27). Festus is sending Paul to Rome, but he doesn't know what to report about him because Paul is innocent. Because Paul's speech in this case is not technically a legal defense, it is different from the previous speeches. It involves more of a personal biography with a persuasive evangelistic appeal. Here Paul is defending the foundations of the Christian faith, so we should observe Paul's passion and practice carefully.[1]

[1] Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 366–367.

Discussion Questions

As Paul begins his defense in 26:1-11, what connections does he make between Christian faith and the Jewish religion?

What did Paul think was the issue for which he was being held prisoner (see 26:6–8)?

For a third and final time in Acts, we hear the story of Paul on the road to Damascus. What are the distinct elements of his mission and message to the Gentiles that Jesus gives to Paul, as recounted by Paul in 26:12-18?

Why do you think Paul so often told about his conversion in his defenses (see 22:2–21; 26:2–23)? Why was this a good evangelistic technique?

How does Paul then claim that he is fulfilling rather than undermining the most ancient traditions and richest hopes of his people (26:19-23)?

Agrippa could do nothing to free Paul since he had appealed to Caesar. Why did Paul give this speech and the words in 26:25–27 (see 26:29)?

Agrippa cleverly avoids giving a direct answer to Paul's question in 26:27. Why would it be difficult for Agrippa to answer either yes or no?

How does Paul set an example for you as a Christian in 23:12–26:32 (consider especially 24:10–26; 25:8–11; 26:1–29)?

Why was the Resurrection the decisive issue between Paul and the Jews? Is it the decisive issue between you and anyone? Why or why not?

Why do you think Luke was so interested in detailing the relationship between Christianity and the government (the Sanhedrin; the Philippian and Thessalonian magistrates; the governors Sergius Paulus, Gallio, Felix, and Festus; and King Agrippa)?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline

Main Idea: Paul's speech before Festus sets the stage for Paul's final defense before Agrippa; from the latter we can learn to live as faithful witnesses.

II. Paul Before Agrippa (26:1–32)

Paul's speech is stated carefully and stylistically; it's appropriate for his audience. Commentator Ben Witherington notes six elements in Greek rhetorical style at work here (*Acts of the Apostles,* 737–38). Additionally, this speech is similar to Paul's speech before the Jewish mob (22:1–21). Within this life summary, two themes dominate. First, Paul magnifies the cross and resurrection (26:6–8, 22–23). Second, Paul insists that this new faith is actually an extension of Judaism (Bock, *Acts,* 705). While Paul addresses a largely Gentile assembly and alludes to a number of witnesses present, the speech is more for Agrippa's benefit than anyone else's. Paul tries to persuade King Agrippa to bow before King Jesus (Johnson, *Let's Study Acts,* 312). Paul is a man with a commission. He's not pouting, complaining, or trying to negotiate a deal in front of this monarch. He's preaching the gospel to him.

A. Paul's _____ remark to Agrippa (26:1–3)

Agrippa is in charge of the meeting. Paul begins his "defense" (*apologia*) of the gospel by first stretching out his hand as a sign of respect for the Jewish king, not as a sign for silencing the crowd (Bruce, *Book of Acts,* 461). Paul then makes a generous comment to the king (*capitatio benevolentiae)*, noting the king's familiarity with Jewish customs. He then respectfully asks Agrippa to listen patiently to his defense.

B. Paul's thoroughly _____ upbringing (26:4–8; cf. 22:3)

Paul describes his strict upbringing in Judaism. He then states a major theme in the speech: his faith is not a violation of his Jewish heritage; his faith actually links to the Old Testament's promises (Bock, *Acts,* 714). Jesus's death and resurrection are fulfillments of the Jewish messianic hope. Paul, then, is saying that he has never left his Jewish tradition. His faith is rooted in a belief the Jews share.

C. Paul's _____ of Christians (26:9–11; cf. 22:4–5)

Next, Paul admits that he once found the resurrection incredible. More than that, Paul—then known as Saul—persecuted Christians (v. 9; cf. 2:22). Eventually, Paul would know Jesus as "Lord," but at first, he looked on Jesus of Nazareth and his people with contempt. He locked up the "saints" in prison and voted for their deaths (vv. 9–10). Further, Paul "punished" Christians and tried to make them deny who Jesus really is or even to curse him (Bock, *Acts,* 715).

D. Paul's _____ (26:12–15; cf. 22:6–11)

But then Paul the terrorist, having been commissioned by the chief priest to continue his persecution, became Paul the evangelist when he met Jesus on the Damascus Road. To paraphrase, Paul says to Agrippa, "I saw a light; I heard a voice" (vv. 13–14). The light was brighter than the sun. Everyone fell down at its appearance, so this wasn't a private experience for Paul; it was a real, external experience (Bock, *Acts,* 716).

E. Paul's _____ (26:16–18; cf. 22:17–21)

"This commission constitutes the center and climax of Paul's entire speech," John Polhill notes. "It's virtually repeated in Paul's closing words" (cf. vv. 22–23; *Acts,* 503). Paul's commission reflects the prophetic tradition. Like Ezekiel, Paul was directed to rise and stand on his feet (v. 16; cf. Ezek 2:1). As in the case of the prophets, the Lord sent Paul (cf. Ezek 2:3) and promised to rescue him from his enemies (v. 17; cf. Jer 1:6–8; Acts 27). Paul was appointed as a "servant" and a "witness" of the things associated with Christ (v. 16). "His whole story in Acts has shown his faithful witness—before Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Romans, peasants, philosophers, and kings" (ibid.). Every Christian stands in this line of being a servant of Jesus and a witness for him (1:8). The Lord called Paul to proclaim the comprehensive *benefits* of the gospel (vv. 18–19) to a comprehensive *audience*. The latter is referenced in verse 17: "your people" and "the Gentiles"; and in verse 22: "both small and great." This is a reminder that no one is beyond the reach of or need for God's saving grace.

F. Paul's _____ for Christ (26:19–23)

Beginning in verse 19 Paul shows how he carried out the commission Christ gave him. He preached in Damascus, in Jerusalem, in all of Judea, and to the Gentiles (v. 20). With a message of repentance reminiscent of John the Baptist's (Luke 3:8), Paul urges everyone to bear fruit in a way that reflects their new life in Christ. While good works aren't the basis of salvation, they are the fruit of salvation (cf. 2 Cor 13:5–7; Gal 5:22–23; Eph 2:8–10; Titus 2:14; 3:8). Paul then describes that he preaches the Christ of Scripture to everyone through "help from God" (vv. 22–23). God provides the power, and God provides the message, which centers on a person, Jesus Christ.

G. Paul's _____ to Agrippa (26:24–32)

Festus can't contain himself after hearing Paul's message (cf. 25:19) and thus interrupts Paul's speech. He says Paul is insane for believing such things (v. 24; cf. 2 Cor 5:13). A belief in the resurrection was, in fact, a crazy idea to Romans. Festus's outburst serves as a reminder that the gospel really is "foolishness" to some (1 Cor 1:23; cf. Acts 17:18, 32). Nonetheless, Paul defends himself respectfully and candidly, assuring Festus that he's speaking "true and rational words" (v. 25 ESV).

Paul then pivots his attention back to King Agrippa…Agrippa, however, dodges the question. He can't say he denies the prophets, but he also doesn't want to say yes and have Paul press him further (Polhill, *Acts,* 5–8)…At this point Paul, growing bolder still, makes a direct evangelistic appeal (v. 29). Paul wanted everyone to believe the good news about Jesus—regardless of how long it took. He wanted them to have what he enjoyed in Christ. In this captivating scene the people listening are actually the ones in chains, in spiritual bondage. Paul, on the other hand, can still soar in joyful praise even while physically chained. He wants freedom and joy for his audience.

Paul's evangelistic desire is conveyed here as he makes a prayerful wish: "I wish before God," or "I pray to God" (NIV). Paul's statement reflects the heart of one interceding for the lost audience. The man had been beaten and persecuted by Jews and ridiculed by the Romans, but

he still wanted people to know the Savior! Once again Paul gives us a model for witnessing to unbelievers—not only in words but also in heart.

Finally, Agrippa rises to his feet (v. 30). The speech is over. Agrippa, Bernice, and other prominent people meet together and privately affirm Paul's innocence (v. 31; 25:19–20, 25). As in the case of Jesus, Paul is so thoroughly innocent that he isn't even worthy of imprisonment (Bock, *Acts,* 724). Agrippa thus concludes that Paul could go free if he hadn't appealed to Caesar (v. 32). But since nothing can short-circuit such an appeal, it's time to honor Caesar by asking him to render a decision in Paul's case (ibid.).Paul faithfully delivered the gospel. Agrippa tragically rejected Israel's Messiah. It was time for Paul to continue testifying to the gospel of grace in Rome.

III. Application for Faithful Witnesses (26:1–32)

A. Address unbelievers _____ (26:1–3).
Paul's generous and courteous comment to Agrippa reflects the spirit of Peter's words to Christians living in a hostile culture…What we say is more important than how we say it, but our delivery methods and tone matter to God and to those we're addressing. Therefore, we should seek to blend truthfulness with tenderness and courage with compassion.

B. Express what it was like _____ (26:4–11, 14).
Paul's recounting of his former way of life before his conversion illustrates this approach. Sometimes it helps people understand the gospel when we explain our perspectives and practices prior to our acceptance of Christ. In sympathizing with our audiences in this way, we may gain better hearings. To be clear, our personal stories are not the gospel, but our ability to identify with our listeners is important.

C. Aim to _____, not self (26:12–15).
Paul's Damascus road story is ultimately a story about Jesus, not one about Paul. The apostle always took care to keep Jesus the hero of his testimony, and this is a great reminder that Jesus should always be the clear hero of the personal stories we tell too. It sounds too obvious to mention, but when speaking to unbelievers, we should speak a lot about Jesus. Like Paul, we must keep talking about him again and again. Even when we begin a spiritual conversation by talking about our own lives, we need to use threads of those stories to point hearers to the Savior.

D. Share the need for and the benefits of the gospel with _____ (26:16–18).
The evangelists in Acts kept speaking about the Lord's *grace* in opening eyes, in transferring people into the kingdom of light, in transferring them into the power of God from out of the grip of Satan, and in granting them an inheritance. So, like Paul, we must speak to all people groups, "both small and great," about their need for the gospel and about the amazing benefits

of embracing the gospel. We must speak honestly about the sinful condition of humans and about the amazing grace of Jesus toward sinners.

E. Stick to the message of the _____ and the call to _____ based on Scripture (26:19–23).

If you ever have any doubt about what to say when bearing witness, head for the cross, to an account of the resurrection, and then give a clear call for repentance. From the first chapter of Acts onward, Luke continues to emphasize the Messiah who suffered, died, and rose from the dead. Present in the preaching of the apostles was the promised Messiah of the Scriptures. And also present was the call to repent and believe. Until we see Christ, let's not get tired of talking about the heart of the gospel.

F. Rely on the help that comes from _____ (26:22).

Paul's comment in verse 22 reminds us that our help comes from God. To be faithful servants and witnesses of Jesus, we need to rely on Jesus for power and grace.

G. Make specific _____ boldly (26:24–28).

The gospel demands a response, and we should be ready to pose some probing questions to our unbelieving neighbors. We must give them clear chances to accept or reject Christ. Paul certainly did so with Agrippa. Be respectful but not cowardly.

H. Be prepared for _____ and _____ (26:24).

Festus called Paul insane, and we may expect similar comments to be aimed at us when we follow Paul's example. We're simply called to deliver the message about humanity's need for Jesus. Only God converts. We can thus trust him with the results of our efforts, and we can rest in his presence when attacked.

I. Pray for the people you're _____ (26:29).

Paul's words to the crowd, "I wish before God," remind us of what kind of hearts we as modern evangelists need. Paul prayerfully desires everyone in the assembly to know Jesus. This suggests that he has a heart of compassion toward his hearers. We shouldn't see unbelievers as projects, then, but as people made in God's image who, because of sin, are in need of God's salvation. We should desire that they come to know the same saving grace that we have experienced through the Savior (cf. Rom 10:1; 1 Tim 2:1–4).

May God grant us help to make his grace known to a broken world in loving ways. That same grace that changed Paul has changed us. We must proclaim it.

Conclusion/Missional Challenge

Paul does not let the success of the king or the governor, or all those around him adorned in their wealth and power, deter him from his mission. He sees right through their pomp and prosperity. The eternal riches of Christ eclipse all the wealth and power this world can offer.

This is why we preach the gospel. We preach that others might taste and see that the Lord is good. We proclaim the good news that others might enjoy the splendor and majesty of Christ. We enjoin our neighbors, our families, and our coworkers to come and know Christ because we have come to understand the glory of his forgiveness, the beauty of his grace, and the riches of joy in his being. We want them to enjoy all that we enjoy in the gospel. How can we keep it to ourselves?

The king's response to Paul reminds us that in our evangelism we may not always or ever see a revival break out when we proclaim God's word. Evangelism takes time. Christians cast out gospel seeds. God gives the growth. God has called us to faithfulness; and he will tend to the rest. Yes, we present our messages persuasively. Yes, we urge our hearers to repent. It is God, however, who completes the work. You and I, like the apostle Paul, must simply be faithful to proclaim.[2]

[2] R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Acts 13–28 for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2019), 179–180.

Lesson 43 (12-4-22):
Rome at Last!, Part 1 (Acts 27:1-44)

Paul Sails for Rome

27 And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other
prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius. **2** And embarking in a ship of
Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea,
accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica. **3** The next day we put in at
Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for.
4 And putting out to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were
against us. **5** And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and
Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. **6** There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing
for Italy and put us on board. **7** We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty
off Cnidus, and as the wind did not allow us to go farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off
Salmone. **8** Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which
was the city of Lasea.

9 Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was
already over, Paul advised them, **10** saying, "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury
and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." **11** But the centurion
paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. **12** And
because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to
sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete,
facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

The Storm at Sea

13 Now when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they
weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. **14** But soon a tempestuous wind,
called the northeaster, struck down from the land. **15** And when the ship was caught and could
not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. **16** Running under the lee of a small
island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat. **17** After hoisting it up,
they used supports to undergird the ship. Then, fearing that they would run aground on the
Syrtis, they lowered the gear, and thus they were driven along. **18** Since we were violently
storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. **19** And on the third day they threw
the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. **20** When neither sun nor stars appeared for
many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

21 Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, "Men,
you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and
loss. **22** Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of
the ship. **23** For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and
whom I worship, **24** and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And

behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.' [25] So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. [26] But we must run aground on some island."

[27] When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. [28] So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms. [29] And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. [30] And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, [31] Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." [32] Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go.

[33] As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing. [34] Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you." [35] And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. [36] Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. [37] (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) [38] And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.

The Shipwreck

[39] Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore. [40] So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. [41] But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. [42] The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. [43] But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, [44] and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

- Acts 27:1-44

On April 15, 1912, at approximately 2:20 A.M. the stern of the White Star liner *Titanic* swung slowly upward toward the stars. Her lights went out, flashed on again, then went out for good. Only a single kerosene lantern flickered high in the aftermast. As her stern reached higher, a steady roar thundered across the water as every movable thing aboard her broke loose. There has never been a mixture like it: 15,000 bottles of ale and stout, huge anchor chains (each link weighed 175 pounds), thirty cases of golf clubs, 30,000 fresh eggs, potted palms, five grand pianos, a cask of china for Tiffany's, a case of gloves for Marshall Field's, and, most valuable of all, 1,500 passengers who had not been able to get off the great ship.

The great and the unknown tumbled together in a writhing heap as the bow eased deeper and the stern rose higher. The *Titanic* was now absolutely vertical, with her three dripping propellers glistening in the darkness. For nearly two minutes she stood poised as the noise finally stopped. Then she began sliding slowly under, until the sea closed over the flagstaff on her stern with an audible gulp.

A wreck of any kind is a terrifying experience, whether it be a train derailment, an automobile collision, or the crash of an airplane. But probably the most terrifying of all is a shipwreck, because of the prolonged agony that the passengers and crew endure. Acts 27 is the tale of one of the most famous shipwrecks in history—that of the Apostle Paul on his way to Rome. It is also one of the best-told, most-detailed shipwreck accounts in ancient history—and certainly the most profitable to the hearer.[1]

Acts 27 ushers in a climactic demonstration of God's providence and sovereignty. Throughout this chapter and the next, Paul faces very arduous situations. Yet, as the narrative unfolds, readers quite clearly see that Paul is right where God wants him. Thus, Acts 27 presents a picture of God's hand providentially orchestrating human decisions and natural events to accomplish his perfect will.[2]

Discussion Questions

From verses 1-3 and 43, what do you know about the centurion in charge? How does his concern for Paul indicate the way Paul used his time while imprisoned in Caesarea?

What in verse 13-20 reveals how severe this storm was?

As a sailor on board, how would you feel about Paul's message in verses 21-26?

Consider Paul's behavior throughout this eventful part of the voyage toward Rome. What do his actions and words tell you about his attitudes toward the others on the ship, toward his own destiny and toward the Lord?

Some Christians have been taught that once they have faith everything ought to flow smoothly. What would Acts have to tell us about that?

---

[1] R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 331.

[2] R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Acts 13–28 for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2019), 181.

How does this narrative display both the sovereign providence of God and the responsibility of humans?

Explain some ways Paul displays great spiritual and practical leadership in this story.

Think of situations and circumstances in your life in which you clearly saw (or can now see, looking back) the Lord's providence. How can the reality of God's providence change the way you handle present or future trials in your life?

What (if anything) holds you back from having the same confidence in the Lord that Paul expresses in verses 22–25? Are you praying for that kind of calm trust?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline
Main Idea: God keeps his promises, so we should trust him and give thanks to him.

I. Tracing the Narrative (27:1–44)

A. All _____ (27:1–5)
The story begins with a reference to "we." As we've noted previously (e.g., Acts 16; 20), the narrator who is present is *Luke*. Dr. Luke proves an intelligent, diligent, and accurate historian. He reports as an eyewitness about the stops along the trip, the nature of the ships, the sailing practices, and the sailors' experiences.

The final destination of this trip was "Italy" (v. 1; cf. "Rome," 28:16). In Paul's day Gentiles saw Rome as the center of the earth (Bock, *Acts,* 726). It was a strategic place to get the gospel out to the nations because everything went in and out of Rome—hence, Paul's desire to go there (Rom 1:10–16; 15:22–23)… About three years before this trip, Paul had written his letter to the Romans preparing them for his visit. Later, in a time of crisis, the Lord assured Paul that he would indeed testify in Rome itself (23:11).

Under the best of conditions, and sailing straight to Rome from Caesarea, it would take five weeks to transfer Paul to his intended destination. But when this trip is over, the journey will have taken well over four months (Bock, *Acts,* 746).

Other prisoners were with the group, along with a centurion named Julius, who will display a spirit of generosity and kindness in his leadership throughout the trip. Importantly, these prisoners may have been going to Rome not to stand trial, but to serve in the arena as part of entertainment for the emperor and the citizens (Keener in Witherington III, *Acts of the Apostles,* 758n17)…Aristarchus also made the trip (v. 2). Later, when Paul writes to the Colossians from the Roman prison, he mentions the presence of both Luke and Aristarchus (Col 4:10, 14). Aristarchus had been traveling with Paul for some time and was caught up in the persecution Paul faced in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:29; 20:4). Paul describes him as his "fellow prisoner" (Col 4:10), and in Philemon (another prison letter) he calls him his coworker…

The coastal vessel sailed about seventy nautical miles north to the ancient city of "Sidon" (v. 3). While there, Julius kindly gave Paul permission to go enjoy the fellowship of "his friends"—that is, some Christians in the area (cf. 11:19). Julius, then, didn't see Paul as dangerous. These friends cared for Paul, providing essentials for his trip. There were no restaurants or vending machines on this vessel… Due to the western winds, the ship sailed north and east of Cyprus (v. 4). Sailing literally "under the lee" means sailing in such a way that the island protects the vessel from the winds. Then they sailed "through the open sea off Cilicia and Pamphylia," before reaching "Myra in Lycia" (v. 5).

B. All _____ (27:6–12)

In Myra, Julius finds a ship from Alexandria that is "sailing for Italy," so he brings the passengers on board (v. 6). John Stott notes that this vessel was a freight ship used for transporting grain (v. 38), with Egypt being Rome's main granary (*Message of Acts,* 387).

In verses 7–8 Luke describes the "difficulty" of the next part of the trip as conditions deteriorated. Progress was slow due to the contrary winds. The passengers and crew were no doubt relieved to stop at Fair Havens to rest and make further plans.

Fair Havens, or "Good Harbor," sounds like a nice place to stay, but it wasn't a suitable spot to face the winter season…Paul's counsel reflected this understanding: thinking it unsafe to venture out west to find another place to endure winter, he warns the men in what seems to be a meeting with his own personal advice rather than a word of prophecy. He tells them that if they proceed, they are likely to lose cargo and lives (v. 10).

Even though Paul was an experienced traveler, having already endured three shipwrecks (2 Cor 11:25), he was outnumbered by the majority. The crew determined to travel about forty miles or so west to a better harbor at Phoenix (Acts 27:12). Paul's counsel, however, turns out to be true in that the crew did lose the ship and the cargo. Fortunately, however, no lives were lost (Polhill, *Acts,* 519). Later, Julius learns from this mistake and listens to Paul (v. 31).

C. All _____ (27:13–20)

Initially the journey goes smoothly. In fact, things move along so well that it's easy to imagine the sailors making fun of Paul for giving them the unnecessary word of caution. But then things change, A violent storm nicknamed with a hybrid formation of the Greek term *euros*, the east

wind, and Latin term *aquilo*, the north wind (*eurakylon* or "northeaster"), comes down from the mountain and takes over the ship. The sailors are unable to do anything to fight the wind and are forced to let the ship drift southwest toward the African coastal city of Cyrene (v. 15)

Verse 16 mentions the small island of Cauda, about twenty-three miles away from Crete. There the ship ran under the lee; it sheltered on the side of the island. Luke describes the sailors' attempt to secure the ship. First they hauled in the ship's lifeboat, and then they tried to undergird the ship itself (v. 17). Next they attempted to lower "the drift-anchor," hoping to slow progress in case this great storm blew them toward the deadly shoals…Verse 18 reports that the men jettisoned at least part of "the cargo," and the ship's "tackle" was thrown overboard in verse 19. Discarding any unnecessary equipment was a technique used to make the ship float higher on the water. These efforts had little effect, however, and soon great panic filled the ship. Despite all these efforts to survive the storm, "all hope was fading." The men were left with no gear, no stars, and no hope (Bock, *Acts,* 736).

D. All _____ (27:21–26)

It's in the midst of great crisis that Paul gives his first of three intervening words, which will help bring everyone onboard to safety (vv. 21–38)… This first word from Paul is a word of encouragement, rooted in a word from the Lord. In the middle of the storm, everyone was hungry, hopeless, and directionless. Then Paul "stood up" to speak (v. 21), reflecting the posture used to deliver previous authoritative messages (e.g., 2:14; 17:22). His first words seem at first to be an "I told you so" speech, but I think he was simply encouraging the group to listen to him as a credible speaker. He tells them good news on this occasion, saying that no one will die as a result of their predicament, but their ship will be lost (v. 22). He attempts to lift their spirits with this word.

How could Paul be so confident on this point? This time his word to the crew came from the Lord, who had advised him through an angel in the night (v. 23). That means that what the apostle shares here was more than Paul's opinion or wish. The angel gave Paul two promises: (1) Paul *must* appear before Caesar; and (2) all aboard the ship would be graciously delivered with Paul (v. 24). Because of these promises, there was no need to fear.

Paul's first speech in this narrative is central. He and the others will make it safely through the storm because of *the providence of God*. The Lord will keep his promises. He will see to it that Paul gets to Rome. Even so, Paul still warns his audience that there remains more storm to endure and that they will run aground on some island before final deliverance (v. 26). Thus, *human responsibility* is also in view.

In the storm narratives of the Gospels, Jesus addresses the disciples' fear (Mark 4:35–41; 6:45–52). In these moments, Jesus shows the disciples that he is Lord of the storm. His words, "Have courage! It is I. Don't be afraid" (Mark 6:50), are words of comfort for all his saints. We are prone to have "little faith" (Matt 8:26). But Jesus can be trusted even when waves crash around us. The Lord said these reassuring words through Isaiah: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine. I will be with you when you pass through the

waters" (Isa 43:1–2). What set Paul apart from the others on the ship was his assurance of the presence of God and the promises of God. And that's what we have too. Fight fear by remembering God's faithful promises. Rest in his comforting presence.

E. All _____ (27:27–32)

Verses 27–30 set up Paul's next intervening word to the crew. We read that they were drifting in the Adriatic Sea on the fourteenth night since the storm first struck (v. 27). Luke's reference to the "Adriatic Sea" used a first-century name for the north central Mediterranean between Crete and Malta (Gangel, *Acts,* 451). The seasoned sailors sensed that land was near, so they dropped anchors and prayed to their gods for daylight (vv. 28–29). But the pagan sailors apparently didn't trust in their gods very much: some of them tried to escape under the pretense of letting out anchors. (These anchors would have to be set out at a distance from the bow using the lifeboat.) The sailors' real plan was to row the lifeboat to shore (v. 30).

Paul discerned their plan and reported it to Julius and the soldiers (v. 31). They listened to Paul's advice this time and let the lifeboat go free, ensuring that everyone stayed together (v. 32). This action reveals how respected Paul has become during the course of the journey, even though this particular course of action appeared reckless. God's promise to preserve everyone seems to have presupposed that all stay with the ship (Stott, *Message of Acts,* 391).

F. All _____ (27:33–38)

As dawn drew near, Paul gave his third word of instruction to the group, urging them to eat… The occasion to eat gave Paul an opportunity to give a visible display of his devotion to the Giver of all good things. Taking the role of a father or a host, he offered the blessing, distributed the food, and began to eat (v. 35). This description reminds us of the feeding of the five thousand (Luke 9:16), Jesus's meal with the Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:30), and especially the institution of the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19).

The men aboard the ship, however, were not taking the Lord's Supper; they were eating for the sake of nourishment. Paul knew that hungry men are useless men. Nevertheless, "Paul's calm consumption, and especially his public thanksgiving to the God of all grace, bears witness to the peace amid life's storms that Jesus gives through the new covenant" (Johnson, *Let's Study Acts,* 335). It wasn't a sacred meal the men shared, but it was indeed a "sacred moment" (Bock, *Acts,* 740).

The crew of 276 men was "encouraged" (v. 36; cf. vv. 22, 25) and followed Paul's example by eating (v. 36). After the meal, they jettisoned the rest of the grain in order to lighten the ship (vv. 37–38). Buoyed by Paul's words, they were confident that they would obtain access to food again; it was time to lift the boat higher in the water as they were drawing near to the shore (Bock, *Acts,* 740).[3]

[3] Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 387.

Looking back over this dramatic episode in Paul's life, several key principles of true biblical leadership can be clearly seen.

First, a leader is _____. Paul was an important prisoner, whose escape or death would have meant serious trouble for Julius. Yet somehow during the brief journey from Caesarea to Sidon, Paul convinced the centurion that he could be trusted. Julius therefore let him leave the ship to be ministered to by the Christians there.

Second, a leader takes the _____. At the council at Fair Havens, Paul, although a prisoner, did not hesitate to give his advice.

Third, a leader uses _____. Had the centurion and sailors heeded Paul's sound advice, they would have been spared a terrible ordeal—and the loss of the ship.

Fourth, a leader speaks with _____. In the midst of the raging storm, Paul's confident assertion that all on board would be saved must have seemed like madness. But his unshakable confidence in God's Word caused him to speak out boldly. Paul also called others to obedience; he was the one who prevented the sailors from abandoning the rest of the passengers (v. 31).

Fifth, a leader _____ others. Paul three times encouraged the terrified passengers and crew (vv. 22, 25, 34)—twice not to lose hope and once to eat. His calmness, confidence, and optimistic trust in God also reassured the others.

Sixth, a leader never compromises his _____. Paul prevented the crew from prematurely abandoning the ship. God had said that all would be saved, but all must remain together, and Paul refused to compromise on that instruction.

Seventh, and most important, a leader leads by _____. Believing God would do exactly as He said, Paul set an example for the others by remaining calm and confident. Realizing they needed to eat before attempting to get ashore, Paul "took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all; and he broke it and began to eat" (v. 35). His example motivated the others, "and they themselves also took food" (v. 36). Leaders do not push people from behind; they lead them from the front.

These timeless principles of leadership, manifested in the midst of appalling circumstances, reveal Paul as the godly leader he was. They must characterize every leader who wishes to effectively lead God's people.[4]

[4] John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 356–357.

G. All _____ (27:39–44)

As the sun appeared on the horizon, the crew could see a place to run the ship ashore. With the storm still blowing, they cast off the anchors, freed up the rudders, and went straight for the beach. That's when the ship struck a sandbar. The bow was hung up on the sandbar, and the stern was exposed to the pounding waves. Soon the ship would be totally shattered, as Paul had warned.

At this point Julius's soldiers faced a double threat. To stay alive, they needed to swim to shore. But if they make it to land and some prisoners escaped, the guards would face execution for those losses (cf. 12:19; 16:27). In light of this fear, the soldiers prepared to kill the prisoners before jumping overboard themselves. But Julius intervened because he wanted to save Paul. This move shows that Julius's respect for Paul had grown, and he may have believed Paul's prophecy. Julius ordered everyone to head for the land by swimming or floating to shore. Luke concludes, "In this way, everyone safely reached the shore" (v. 44). All survived! Once again God's word proves true. We can trust him.

Conclusion/Missional Challenge

From the drama that unfolds along this route, we see a wonderful picture of the seamless integration between God's providence and human responsibility. Indeed, the most important lesson related to this passage is that *God keeps his word* (see 27:4–26). God told Paul that he would reach Rome. He did. In the story God tells Paul that none of the prisoners will be lost. They aren't. God tells Paul that the ship will run aground. And again God's word proves true, just as it always does! At work here is the theme that God will accomplish his purposes, so we should obey and trust him.[5]

Indeed, nothing will stop God's will or hinder his purposes for his church. In this age, God does not promise his people a life free from suffering and trials. Paul endured much for the cause of the gospel. But he pressed on because of God's promise. Christians today sometimes fail in zealous obedience because we lose sight of the spectacular reward that awaits those who obey God. God has promised an eternity unlike anything we can imagine. He has promised that we will be with him, face to face—that death will be no more and sin will pass away. There will be no more tears. No more death. No more sadness. No more grief. God calls his people to seize his promises and hold them tight. Our obedience will only be as strong as our faith in the promises of God. Paul said in **verse 25**, "So take heart … for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told." Does the church today possess such faith? Do we believe in the promises of God? Do we live as if we believe in his promises?[6]

---

[5] Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 381.

[6] R. Albert Mohler Jr., *Acts 13–28 for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2019), 187.

Lesson 44 (12-11-22):
Rome at Last!, Part 2 (Acts 28:1-16)

Paul on Malta
28 After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta.
2 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. **3** 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. **4** 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."
5 He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. **6** 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.

7 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. **8** 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. **9** And when this had taken place, the rest of the
people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. **10** They also honored us
greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed.

Paul Arrives at Rome
11 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. **12** Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days.
13 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. **14** There we found brothers and were
invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. **15** 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. **16** And when we came into Rome, Paul
was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.

- Acts 28:1-16 ESV

It is a foundational biblical truth that obedience brings God's blessing, disobedience His chastening. In Luke 11:28, Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God, and observe it." James reveals that it is the "effectual doer" who "shall be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25)…One way God blesses those who obey Him is by granting their desires. In Psalm 21:1–2, David wrote, "O Lord, in Thy strength the king will be glad, and in Thy salvation how greatly he will rejoice! Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and Thou hast not withheld the request of his lips." Psalm 37:4 promises, "Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the

desires of your heart," while Psalm 145:19 declares, "He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him." Proverbs 10:24 contrasts the disobedient with the obedient: "What the wicked fears will come upon him," but "the desire of the righteous will be granted."

The apostle Paul had desired for many years to visit Rome. In Acts 19:21 he said, "After I have been there [Jerusalem], I must also see Rome."…At long last, the time had come for God to grant His faithful servant's desire. After years of waiting, two years in a Roman prison, a terrifying two-week-long storm at sea, and his fourth shipwreck (cf. 2 Cor. 11:25), Paul would at last see Rome. This climactic passage records the story of the apostle's arrival in the imperial capital.

Acts 28 opens with Paul on the Mediterranean island of Malta. He had left Caesarea more than two months earlier, bound for Rome to have his appeal heard by the emperor. In a risky attempt to reach a more favorable harbor on Crete to winter in, the apostle's ship had been caught in the dreaded Euraquilo. That violent storm had driven the vessel for fourteen terror-filled days across the Mediterranean to Malta. There the crew attempted to beach the ship, but it ran aground and was destroyed by the pounding surf. Miraculously, all 276 persons on board managed to reach the shore safely. God had promised Paul that although the ship would be destroyed, no lives would be lost (27:22). He had also promised that the ship would run aground on an island (27:26). Both promises were fulfilled when the ship reached Malta.[1]

Discussion Questions

In light of the fact God wanted Paul to get to Rome, why do you think he allowed the events of 27:1-28:9 to happen?

Besides saving the lives of Paul and the rest of the people on board, what opportunities does the shipwreck on Malta provide for Paul?

When has God given you unexpected opportunities to serve him?

What do you think of the Maltese view of Justice? Does God always give retribution like this? Why or why not?

Does Luke imply in 28:3–6 that there is something superhuman about Paul? Why or why not?

[1] John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 358–359.

Paul's life was saved several times on this trip: land was sighted, the crew did not abandon the passengers, the centurion kept the soldiers from killing the prisoners, non-swimmers could float ashore even though the ship ran aground, and the viper was somehow harmless.

a. What did the Maltese natives conclude from all this (see 28:4–6)?

b. To what do you think Paul and Luke attributed these "lucky coincidences"?

Should we conclude from these events that God will always protect His servants—if not from hardship, then at least from death? If so, why? If not, why not, and what should we conclude?

In what ways can the church today be too quick to draw conclusions about someone's sin when they suffer, and someone's integrity or calling when they succeed?

In your opinion, why did Luke describe the ship voyage to Rome at such length—longer than Paul's time in Corinth or Ephesus? What was so important about this episode?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson is adapted from John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994).]

The events of Acts 28:1–16 unfold in five scenes:

I. Pagan _____ (28:1-2)

The reaction of the Maltese to their unexpected visitors proves that they were anything but uncivilized. Luke records that they **showed extraordinary kindness,** beyond what would normally be expected. They did not murder or enslave the victims of the shipwreck, as sometimes happened in the ancient world. Instead, Luke says, **because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all.** Exhausted from their long ordeal, soaked from their swim to shore, drenched by the driving rain, and chilled by the cold November wind, they welcomed a fire to warm themselves.

God requires Christians, both church leaders (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8) and all believers (Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9), to show hospitality. That the pagan Maltese exhibited it illustrates

an important theological truth. One aspect of God's general revelation to all people is the moral law written on their hearts. Although the specifics may vary, every culture holds some things to be right and other things to be wrong.

II. Potential _____ (28:3-6)

Having **gathered a bundle of sticks,** Paul **laid them on the fire.** Unfortunately, one of the "sticks" was alive, and **a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand.** Startled from its lethargy by the sudden heat, the venomous reptile immediately bit Paul on the hand. Critics have charged that this is a fictional attempt by Luke to glorify Paul, or that Luke mistook a harmless snake for a poisonous one. They raise those objections because Malta today has no poisonous snakes. But that does not prove that there were none there nineteen centuries ago. They have disappeared due to the progress of civilization on Malta since Paul's day. As a trained physician, Luke would be unlikely to mistake a harmless snake for a poisonous one…

When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." Here is another illustration of the truth that all cultures have a sense of justice. The islanders had no doubt from the presence of Roman soldiers that Paul was a serious criminal, likely a **murderer,** and as such would not escape his fate. Although he had **been saved from the sea, justice** would not allow **him to live.** The pagan Maltese had a clear sense of right and wrong; they "show[ed] the work of the Law written in their hearts" (Rom. 2:15).

Although once disposed to killing Christians, Paul, since his conversion, was no murderer. He merely **shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm.** The apostle's calmness was conspicuous; most people bitten by poisonous snakes panic. But Paul had absolute faith in God's repeated promises that he would see Rome (Acts 23:11; 27:24). Therefore, he knew he would not die on Malta. As always in Acts, God used this miracle to authenticate His message and His messenger.

The islanders, however, **were** still **expecting** Paul's hand **to swell up** from the bite, **or** that he would **suddenly fall down dead.** But when they **had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.** Obviously they had been mistaken; this was no victim of their goddess but a god himself, they thought. Such divine beings were, they believed, impervious to such trivialities as snakebite. This was not the first time Paul had been mistaken for a god (Acts 14:6ff.), and he no doubt quickly set the islanders straight.

III. Public _____ (28:7-11)

Not far from St. Paul's Bay **were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius.** As his title **the leading man of the island** indicates, he was the Roman governor of

Malta…Publius graciously **welcomed** all 276 persons **and entertained** them **courteously** for **three days** until they could make arrangements for winter quarters.

Publius extended hospitality even though his **father was lying in bed afflicted with recurrent fever and dysentery.** The **recurrent fever** was likely the gastric fever, caused by a microbe found in goat's milk, which was common on Malta. **Dysentery,** often resulting from poor sanitation, was also common in the ancient world.

God often rewards acts of kindness to His people (cf. Gen. 12:3; Matt. 10:40–42; 25:31ff.), and Paul was able to repay Publius for his hospitality. He **went in to see** Publius's father, **and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him.** Paul's prayer acknowledged his dependence on God's power; his laying on of hands affirmed that God was working through him.

Not surprisingly, **after this had happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to** Paul **and getting cured.** Although Luke does not mention it, Paul undoubtedly preached the gospel to the Maltese, since the purpose of miracles was to authenticate Paul as God's messenger. Given Julius's lenient treatment of him, and their three-month stay (v. 11), Paul would have had many opportunities to preach. According to tradition, the church on Malta dates from this time, with Publius as its first pastor. Verse 10 also implies that a church was founded at this time on Malta. Luke records that the islanders **honored** Paul and the others **with many marks of respect; and when** they **were setting sail, supplied** them **with all** they **needed.** That outpouring of love suggests that at least some of the Maltese were receptive to the preaching of the gospel.

After spending the **three months** of winter on Malta, Paul and his companions were finally able to leave. With sea travel beginning again, Julius was able to arrange transport to Italy for his soldiers and prisoners **on an Alexandrian ship which had wintered at the island, and which had the Twin Brothers for its figurehead.** The **Alexandrian ship** was probably another in the imperial grain fleet. Luke's note that it **had the Twin Brothers for its figurehead** serves to identify the specific ship on which they traveled. The **Twin Brothers** were Castor and Pollux, sons of Zeus in Greek mythology and viewed as the gods who protected sailors.

IV. The Promise _____ (28:12-15)

Leaving Malta, the ship **put in at Syracuse,** 100 miles away on the southeastern shore of Sicily. According to tradition, Paul founded a church in Syracuse during the **three days** the ship stopped there. After their short visit, the travelers **sailed around** (tacked against the wind) **and arrived at Rhegium,** on the southern tip of the Italian peninsula. There they waited for a favorable wind to take the ship through the Straits of Messina (which separate Sicily from the Italian mainland). The next **day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day** after leaving Rhegium, the ship arrived at **Puteoli. Puteoli**, modern Pozzuoli, was the most important commercial port in Italy. Although almost 150 miles from Rome, it was the capital's chief seaport. Located on the bay of Naples near Neapolis (modern Naples) and the doomed city of

Pompeii, Puteoli in Paul's day was a city of 100,000 people. It is thought to have been the chief port for the Egyptian grain fleet.

Not unexpectedly in a city of that size, Paul and his companions **found some brethren** (Christians) in Puteoli. Those believers **invited** the travelers **to stay with them,** and, with Julius's permission (cf. 27:3), they stayed **for seven days**. From there, Luke notes with dramatic understatement, **we came to Rome.** Luke then fills in, briefly, the details of their journey along the Appian Way from Puteoli to Rome. **The brethren** (Christians) of Rome**, when they heard about us** (undoubtedly from the Christians of Puteoli)**, came from there as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns to meet us.** Some walked as far south as **the Market of Appius,** forty-three miles from Rome; others, possibly getting a later start, met Paul ten miles closer to Rome at the **Three Inns.** Deeply moved by their visible demonstration of love for him, **Paul thanked God and took courage.**

V. The Prisoner _____ (28:16)

Paul's lenient treatment by Roman officials continued. After the apostle and his party **entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself with a soldier guarding him.** That soldier (probably several in turn) was chained to Paul's wrist (v. 20). This passage reveals several ways in which God blesses His faithful servants.

First, He surrounds them with _____. Julius showed Paul kindness by allowing him to go ashore in Sidon (27:3). The Maltese also showed him kindness after the shipwreck (28:1–2, 10).

Second, God meets their _____*.* Publius provided Paul with a place to stay on Malta (28:7), as did the Christians at Puteoli (28:14).

Third, God _____ *them.* During the terrifying ordeal of the storm at sea, God sent an angel to hearten Paul (27:23–24). And the apostle was greatly encouraged by the Roman Christians, who eagerly met him well outside the city (28:15).

Fourth, God delivers them from _____. He delivered Paul from a storm, a shipwreck, and a snakebite.

Fifth, God blesses their _____*.* Paul greatly affected those who survived the storm and shipwreck. And through his ministry, a church was most likely begun on Malta and possibly at Syracuse.

Finally, God fulfills their _____*.* Paul had yearned for many years to see Rome; now that desire had been granted. Proverbs 28:20 sums it up in the promise "a faithful man will abound with blessing."

Conclusion/Missional Challenge
Those who belong to Jesus can take courage and be thankful as they consider Paul's story. Let me encourage you with three applications from the current passage.

First, you can trust in the providence of God. God is at work, accomplishing his purposes and conforming us into Christ's image (cf. Rom 8:28–30). God keeps his promises. Though you may not understand everything that's happening when you consider the twists and turns of your life, know that God is working for believers' good and for his glory. You can always trust him.

Second, you can rejoice in the saving grace of God. Think about it. If you're a Christian, you are among *the reached.* The gospel came to you. That's a beautiful miracle you should never get tired of pondering! Paul wanted to get the gospel to Rome and then to Spain. Just as it took a lot for Paul to get to Rome, it took a lot for the gospel to get to you. Marvel at God's grace.

Third, you can align yourself with the mission of God. Acts 27–28 remind us of 1:8. Jesus has a mission that extends to the ends of the earth. And what a mission it is! Let's not waste our time on earth. We must use it wisely and missionally for the good of the nations and for the glory of our great King.[2]

[2] Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 392.

Lesson 45 (12-18-22):
The End of the Beginning (Acts 28:17-31)

Paul in Rome

17 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. 18 When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was
no reason for the death penalty in my case. 19 But because the Jews objected, I was compelled
to appeal to Caesar—though I had no charge to bring against my nation. 20 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.” 21 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.
22 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.”

23 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. 24 And some
were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. 25 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:

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.’

28 Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they
will listen.” 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.

- Acts 38:17-31 ESV

The concluding episode of a popular television series always creates a buzz. I remember when the show *Lost* was nearing its last episode. It seemed everyone was asking, "How will it end?" I also remember the mixed reviews that finale got. Many viewers weren't satisfied with the ending, but others liked it. Do you like happy endings? Do you want complete closure when you reach the end of a riveting novel or movie? Does seeing the words "To be continued" typed across the last page or final screen shot drive you to insanity? Do movies and books that allow you to choose your own ending seem somehow dissatisfying?

If you like complete closure and prefer happily-ever-after conclusions, then you might be disappointed with the ending of Acts. Luke has taken us for quite a journey. His writing is remarkable, but his ending might appear surprising and perhaps even a bit frustrating. We have been leading up to Paul's trial before Caesar for many chapters now, but nothing is said about it here! In fact, Acts closes without telling us what happened to Paul. We're not sure how long he lived. We don't know how long he was able to go on ministering unhindered. We can't even be certain he ever made it to Spain. Can you imagine reading a novel that ended like this? If you did, you might write the publisher to say, "Hey! I'm missing a chapter! I need to know what happened to Paul!"

Acts essentially ends on a big "To be continued." Why? Because Luke didn't intend to write a biography of Paul. Luke purposed to describe the acts of the Lord Jesus accomplished by the Spirit. He set out to describe the unstoppable progress of the gospel. His first book, the Gospel of Luke, set out to tell "all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up" (Acts 1:1–2). The book of Acts, then, is about all that Jesus *continued* to do after that point. The ministry of Jesus continued by the Spirit through the church. Luke leaves us with Paul preaching the mighty gospel of the kingdom in Rome. And in choosing to walk away from the story here, Luke masterfully keeps the King—not Paul or anyone else—the hero of Acts. Luke concludes Acts on a note of victory, with the triumph of the King. This is a fitting conclusion.

Luke's message ends up being something like this: "This book is finished, but the mission Jesus assigned to the church isn't." This means that Christians—whether in first-century Rome or in twenty-first-century America—get to enter the story! We get to participate in the next chapters of Acts! We get to join the drama of spreading the good news to the nations. While God replaces messengers over time, the message and the mission assigned to Christians will remain unchanging until the King returns.[1]

Discussion Questions

Why did Paul address the Jews when he got to Rome? (*Optional*: See Acts 13:46; Romans 1:16; 9:1–5; 10:1; 11:1–6, 11–16.)

What did he say to them first (see 28:17–20)?

[1] Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2017), 394–395.

When they courteously agreed to hear him further, what did Paul go on to discuss with the Jews (see 28:23)? What specific methods did he use to appeal to them?

What was the point of the prophecy from Isaiah that Paul quoted (see 28:25–29)?

How did Paul spend his time awaiting trial (see 28:30–31)?

How does verse 31 set the stage for the way your life could become a continuation of Acts 28?

In what way were the Jews responsible for their blindness and deafness to the gospel (see 28:26–27)? Did they want to turn and be healed but God refused, or did they not want this and God gave them their way? (Optional: See Romans 9:1–11:32.)

What are your top three takeaways from having read the book of Acts? What lessons have been most meaningful?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline
Main Idea: The book of Acts concludes with Paul's ministry in Rome, but the mission continues today through God's people.

From Scripture we can identify at least five applications as we seek to continue this mission:

I. Make the Most of Every _____ (28:17–23, 30–31; Phil 1:12–26).
A survey of the New Testament leaves us with the idea that Paul's witness impacted more than just the particular soldiers who guarded him. His witness apparently became the talk of the guards and the palace officials. Some estimate that there were as many as nine thousand Roman guards in that day. Paul's message became known to many of them, to officials, and even to pagans in the streets. In Philippians, also written during this imprisonment, Paul mentions how God was accomplishing his purposes through this incarceration… Many Romans were hearing the good news, and Christians were becoming bolder as a result of Paul's witness. He was a man consumed with Jesus Christ. Let's follow Paul's example. Wherever the Lord has you, make him known!

II. Teach All People about King Jesus from _____ (28:23–31).
As with his ministry in Pisidian Antioch, Paul's second meeting with the Jews drew a much larger crowd (28:23; cf. 13:44). Paul's expositional ministry in this meeting appears to have been focused on persuading the Jews about Christ's importance through the use of the Law of Moses and the Prophets. Nevertheless, as the larger passage indicates, Paul taught *all* people about the King and the kingdom as he had opportunity (vv. 30–31). This reminds us of the necessity of making disciples by teaching everyone about Jesus and his kingdom from the Scriptures.

A. From _____ to _____ (28:23)
Paul had some amazing preaching stamina! In Troas he preached all night (20:7, 11). Here he preached all day. This meeting requested by the Jews wasn't over after a quick, three-minute gospel presentation. Instead, Paul took his time to explain the plan of God within the context of the Scriptures. He built on his hearers' existing background.

Explaining the gospel to unbelievers—especially those who lack any concept of the Christian worldview—may take considerable time…We as Christians have to provide a framework. We have to explain that God made a perfect world, that sin broke it, and that God—out of love—stepped into his creation on a rescue mission to save humans from our wicked choices. Millions today—even highly educated people—have no concept of basic Bible stories or the Christian principles of sin and salvation that we often take for granted. That means we must patiently teach.

B. From _____ to _____ (28:23)
Paul taught about Jesus in accordance with the Old Testament, showing Christ as the hero of the Scriptures. He magnified Jesus as the Messiah throughout his exposition, imitating the pattern set forth by Jesus on the Emmaus road (Luke 24:27, 44–47). Likely influenced by this, Luke ends both his Gospel and Acts by highlighting the exposition of Scripture and the central figure in the Scriptures, Jesus. Here in Acts, Paul's main two subjects are the "kingdom of God" and "Jesus" (vv. 23, 31); they summarized the heart of Paul's instruction. We must continue the church's mission by continuing to expound the Scriptures and pointing people to the hero of the Scriptures!

C. From _____ to _____ (28:23–24)
As we expound the gospel to others, we're not merely trying to transfer information from our brains to theirs. Instead, we should evangelize from our hearts to the hearts of others, always seeking to persuade our hearers to bow the knee to King Jesus—the One who loves them and desires that they too become citizens of his kingdom (cf. 2 Cor 5:11).

D. From _____ to _____ (28:25–28)
In Romans 11 Paul discusses the Jews' failure to hear the gospel (11:8; citing Isa 29:10 and Deut 29:4)—a rejection that's something of a riddle. Paul suggests that the Jewish rejection may be temporary. During this temporary rejection, many Gentiles will believe, and in the end, in the mystery of God's purposes, there will a great turning of Jews to Christ. Here in Acts 28 Paul

simply notes the tragedy of the Jewish rejection of Jesus. A message of salvation was foretold by Jewish prophets, fulfilled in a Jewish Messiah, preached by Jewish evangelists, rejected by the Jews, but embraced by the Gentiles (Polhill, *Acts,* 544).

Initially the conversion of Gentiles like Cornelius was the exception in Christianity, not the norm. At first the Jewish Christians wrestled with the inclusion of the Gentiles (Acts 15). But by the end of Acts, things have changed. Jewish converts are the exception, and Gentile converts are the norm. God's kingdom encompasses the nations. Jewish evangelism must continue, but Christianity primarily involves Gentiles who place faith in Jesus.

III. Ask God to Grant You _____ (28:30–31).
Throughout the book of Acts, this Spirit-produced courage is highlighted as a character trait of faithful witnesses (cf. 4:29–31). Luke wrote earlier, "When they observed the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed and recognized that they had been with Jesus." (4:13; emphasis added) Paul, too, was known for speaking boldly—even in his writings. Let's ask God to grant us this same type of boldness in our evangelistic efforts (cf. Eph 6:19–20).

IV. Maintain an Unshakeable Confidence in _____ (28:31).
Consider how Luke has been tracking the triumph of the gospel in Acts:
So the word of God spread, the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly in number, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith. (6:7)

So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers. (9:31)

But the word of God flourished and multiplied. (12:24)

So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers. (16:5)

In this way the word of the Lord flourished and prevailed. (19:20)

We may now add 28:31 to the list of summary statements expressing the triumph of the Word. We should stop and marvel at the spectacular spread of Christianity. Since the start of Acts, the gospel has taken hold in Jerusalem, in cities all over the ancient world, and has finally made it to Rome…at the end of Acts, we see the beginnings of the worldwide movement of a people who worship the risen King from Nazareth. The gospel's progress and tenacity are breathtaking!...

Now as then the gospel sounds like foolishness to some, yet we who have heard and embraced the message of Scripture know it to be the power of God (cf. 1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:16). So let's not doubt the power of the gospel! Let's not try to domesticate the message. If we empty the cross of its supposed foolishness, we empty it of its power (cf. 1 Cor 1:27).

V. Pour Yourself Out for the King Until You _____ (28:30–31; 2 Tim 4:6–8, 17–18).

In 2 Timothy, Paul's last letter, he concluded with these moving words to his protégé Timothy:

I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. There is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing.…
At my first defense, no one stood by me, but everyone deserted me. May it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that I might fully preach the word and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever! Amen. (2 Tim 4:6–8, 16–18)

Indeed, the Lord delivered Paul safely to Rome, and in time he welcomed the war-torn apostle to his heavenly home. Until we too see the King, let us follow Paul's model of pouring ourselves out in service to the kingdom. Keep fighting. Keep running the race. When you see Jesus Christ with your own eyes, you won't regret having served him faithfully until your dying breath. We as blood-bought Christians will be in the presence of the glorified Nazarene forever. We will be there with the saints from every tribe and tongue, including those, like Paul, who were slain for the sake of the Name. And there we will join a multitude of the redeemed in singing praises to the One who is worthy of all our adoration. The mission of Acts is to be continued until Jesus, the source of life, concludes it.

Conclusion/Missional Challenge

Because Acts is preeminently a book about evangelism, it is appropriate to conclude by drawing several principles of evangelism from Paul's example.

First, Paul preached the gospel whenever and wherever he had opportunity. Under house arrest (vv. 16, 20, 23, 30), he nevertheless continued "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness" (v. 31).

Second, Paul's message was clothed in humility and graciousness. In vv. 17–20, he was tactful, respectful, and conciliatory to the Jewish leaders at Rome.

Third, Paul preached biblically (v. 23) and doctrinally (v. 31).

Fourth, Paul never wasted opportunity. He began his evangelistic outreach only three days after arriving in Rome (v. 17).

Fifth, Paul preached tirelessly (v. 23) and incessantly (vv. 30–31).

Sixth, Paul preached to everyone—both Jews (vv. 23–27) and Gentiles (v. 28).

Finally, and most important, Paul preached Jesus Christ as Lord, Savior, and Messiah (v. 23).

The church in Acts faithfully carried out Christ's charge "Be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The church has passed the baton through many hands down through the centuries to us. Will future generations find that we ran our segment of the race faithfully?[2]

[2] John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 376.

Appendix: Answer Guide

Lesson 34: Encouraging One Another (Acts 20:1-12)

A. How can we encourage the saints this week?

First, we need to ***give*** to others.

Second, we need to ***visit*** with others.

Third, we must ***serve*** with others in ministry.

B. Why don't believers encourage other believers?

I suspect the main reason believers often fail to encourage one another is that we ***think we're too busy to do so****.*

It could also be that we are often too ***self-absorbed*** *to encourage other brothers and sisters.*

A. Gather weekly to celebrate the Lord's Resurrection (20:7–12).

B. Gather weekly to experience the Lord's Supper (20:7, 11).

1. The **Privilege**
2. The **Pattern**
3. The **Power**

C. Gather weekly to hear the Lord's Word (20:7–12).

Lesson 35: Caring for the Blood-Bought Church of God (Acts 20:13-38)

A. He identified with the people (20:18).

B. He served the Lord with humility and passion (20:19).

C. He taught the gospel (20:20–21).

D. He lived by the Spirit and treasured Jesus supremely (20:22–24).

E. He served with a clear conscience (20:25–27).

A. Watch your life (20:28a).

B. Watch the flock (20:28b–32).

A. He avoided greed, worked hard, and practiced generosity (20:33–35).

B. He loved the flock (20:36–38).

Lesson 36: Paul's Journey to Jerusalem (Acts 20:36-21:16)

A. The need for Christian friendship

B. How Christian friendship is established

C. How Christian friendship is experienced

1. Practicing ***hospitality****.*

2. Showing ***affection****.*

3. ***Praying*** *together.*

4. Discussing important ***decisions****.*

1. The perspective of ***Paul*** *(21:1–3).*

2. The perspective of the ***Christians in Tyre*** *(21:4–6).*

3. The perspective of the ***Christians in Caesarea*** *(21:7–13).*

4. The perspective of ***Luke*** *(21:12, 14).*

Lesson 37: Paul in Jerusalem, Part 1a (Acts 21:17-36)

I. Humility and Love Displayed in James and Paul (21:17–26)

A. A God-centered celebration (21:18–20a)

B. A Grace-motivated gift

C. A Gospel-driven plan (21:20b–26)

II. Hostility and Lies Displayed in the Jewish Mob (21:27–36)

Lesson 38: Paul in Jerusalem, Part 1b (Acts 21:37-22:21)

III. Honesty and Loyalty Displayed in Paul's Defense (21:37–22:21)

*First, he wanted them to hear that he was loyal to his **Jewish heritage**.*

*Second, Paul wanted them to know the facts about his **conversion**.*

A. Former Zeal (22:3–5)

B. Encounter with Jesus (22:6–11)

C. Commission (22:12–16)

D. Vision in the temple (22:17–21)

*First, we can learn from Paul's **calmness**.*

*Second, we can learn from Paul's **courage**.*

*Third, we can learn from Paul's **calling**.*

Lesson 39: Paul in Jerusalem, Part 2 (Acts 22:22-23:11)

A. "Paper"—Paul reveals his Roman citizenship (22:22–29).

B. "Rock"—Paul rebukes the High Priest (22:30–23:5).

C. "Scissors"—Paul divides the Pharisees and Sadducees (23:6–10).

A. The Lord knows us.

B. The Lord is with us.

C. The Lord is for us.

D. The Lord isn't finished with us.

Lesson 40: Paul in Caesarea, Part 1 (Acts 23:12-24:27)

I. God Is in Control Even When We're Going through Trials (23:12–35).

A. God uses an unnamed nephew to thwart a plot (23:12–22).

B. God uses Lysias to protect Paul (23:23–30).

C. God uses a Roman army to transport Paul (23:31–35).

II. We Can Be Faithful Witnesses Even in Stressful Situations (24:1–27).

A. Enemies of the gospel will oppose Christians (24:1–9).

First, he accuses Paul of being a ***pest***.

Second, Tertullus contends that Paul is a ***political agitator***.

Third, Tertullus calls Paul ***the leader of a sectarian movement***.

Finally, Tertullus makes a specific charge: Paul was ***disruptive in the Temple*** (v. 6).

B. Faithful witnesses of the gospel speak calmly and courageously (24:10–27).

1) *A Clear **Religious** Record (24:11–16).*

2) *Blameless **Civil** Behavior (24:17–20).*

3) *Personal Message: **Jesus is Alive**! (24:21).*

Lesson 41: Paul in Caesarea, Part 2a (Acts 25:1-27)

A. Festus rejects the Jewish leaders' request (25:1–5).
B. Festus hears Paul's defense (25:6–12).
C. Festus seeks Agrippa's help (25:13–22).
D. Festus presents Paul to Agrippa and the assembly (25:23–27).

Lesson 42: Paul in Caesarea, Part 2b (Acts 26:1-32)

A. Paul's generous remark to Agrippa (26:1–3)
B. Paul's thoroughly Jewish upbringing (26:4–8; cf. 22:3)
C. Paul's persecution of Christians (26:9–11; cf. 22:4–5)
D. Paul's conversion (26:12–15; cf. 22:6–11)
E. Paul's commission (26:16–18; cf. 22:17–21)
F. Paul's witness for Christ (26:19–23)
G. Paul's evangelistic appeal to Agrippa (26:24–32)
A. Address unbelievers respectfully (26:1–3).
B. Express what it was like not to believe (26:4–11, 14).
C. Aim to exalt Jesus, not self (26:12–15).
D. Share the need for and the benefits of the gospel with all types of people (26:16–18).
E. Stick to the message of the resurrection and the call to repentance based on Scripture (26:19–23).
F. Rely on the help that comes from God (26:22).
G. Make specific application boldly (26:24–28).
H. Be prepared for rejection and ridicule (26:24).
I. Pray for the people you're evangelizing (26:29).

Lesson 43: Rome at Last!, Part 1 (Acts 27:1-44)

A. All aboard (27:1–5)
B. All change (27:6–12)
C. All over (27:13–20)
D. All listen (27:21–26)
E. All stay (27:27–32)
F. All eat (27:33–38)
First, a leader is **trusted**.
Second, a leader takes the **initiative**.
Third, a leader uses **good judgment**.
Fourth, a leader speaks with **authority**.
Fifth, a leader **strengthens** others.
Sixth, a leader never compromises his **absolutes**.
Seventh, and most important, a leader leads by **example**.
G. All survive (27:39–44)

Lesson 44: Rome at Last!, Part 2 (Acts 28:1-16)

I. Pagan Hospitality (28:1-2)

II. Potential Harm (28:3-6)
III. Public Healing (28:7-11)
IV. The Promise Honored (28:12-15)
V. The Prisoner Housed (28:16)
*First, He surrounds them with **kindness**.*
*Second, God meets their **needs**.*
*Third, God **encourages** them.*
*Fourth, God delivers them from **harm**.*
*Fifth, God blesses their **influence**.*
*Finally, God fulfills their **desires**.*

Lesson 45: The End of the Beginning (Acts 28:17-31)

I. Make the Most of Every Ministry Opportunity (28:17–23, 30–31; Phil 1:12–26).
II. Teach All People about King Jesus from the Scriptures (28:23–31).
A. From dawn to dusk (28:23)
B. From cover to cover (28:23)
C. From heart to heart (28:23–24)
D. From Jew to Gentile (28:25–28)
III. Ask God to Grant You Spirit-Empowered Boldness (28:30–31).
IV. Maintain an Unshakeable Confidence in the Gospel (28:31).
V. Pour Yourself Out for the King Until You See the King (28:30–31; 2 Tim 4:6–8, 17–18).

Bibliography

Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Whitehead, M. M., Grigoni, M. R., & Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Ac 2:42). Lexham Press.

Bock, D. L. (2007). *Acts*. Baker Academic.

Holcomb, J. S. (2014). *Acts, A 12-Week Study* (J. I. Packer, D. C. Ortlund, & L. T. Dennis, Eds.; Crossway.

Hughes, R. K. (1996). *Acts: the church afire*. Crossway Books.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1994). *Acts* (Vol. 1). Moody Press.

Marshall, I. H. (1980). *Acts: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 5). InterVarsity Press.

Merida, T. (2017). *Exalting Jesus in acts*. Holman Reference.

Mohler, R. A., Jr. (2018). *Acts 13–28 for You* (C. Laferton, Ed.). The Good Book Company.

Sills, M. D. (2017). Opportunities and Challenges in Global Missions. In E. A. Blum & T. Wax (Eds.), *CSB Study Bible: Notes*. Holman Bible Publishers.

Discussion Questions taken from:

Holcomb, J. S. (2014). *Acts, A 12-Week Study* (J. I. Packer, D. C. Ortlund, & L. T. Dennis, Eds.; Crossway.

Merida, T. (2017). *Exalting Jesus in acts*. Holman Reference.

Mohler, R. A., Jr. (2018). *Acts 1–12 for You* (C. Laferton, Ed.). The Good Book Company.

The Navigators. (2012). LifeChange: Acts (K. Lee-Thorp, Ed.). NavPress.

Wright, N. T.; Larsen, Dale; Larsen, Sandy. Acts (N. T. Wright for Everyone Bible Study Guides). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.