

ACTS

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Acts chapter 28 as we continue our study through the Word of God. This evening we will be finishing up our study in the book of Acts, in a sense.

What I mean by that is the book Acts does not end with chapter 28, but it continues on in the lives of God's people today. Yes, it started with the church being born, but, like I have said, the church is not done, not yet!

And we have seen in our study of the book of Acts, not just the birth of the church but we have also seen the growth of the church from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth. Not by the power of man but by the power of God's Spirit enabling man to move the Gospel message forward! That is what Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "**But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**"

Now, as you may remember from our last study, we saw Paul on a ship headed for Rome to appeal his case before Caesar.

Julius, the Roman Centurion was guarding Paul as well as some other prisoners on this journey, one that meant death for some of these men.

As they sailed along the coast they stopped in Myra where they caught an Alexandrian grain ship that was heading for Italy with a total of 276 people on board including Paul.

The problem was that it was getting late in the year to sail and the weather forced them to stop at Fair Havens on the island of Crete.

Because this was not a good place to harbor a ship for the winter, when the weather looked better, they tried to sail some 40 miles to another harbor on the island of Crete, to Phoenix.

As they sailed a terrible storm blew, one that had a name, Euroclydon.

As we have seen this man Paul here in the book of Acts, you have to love the faith of this man. Things looked bad, everyone was nervous about the situation they were in. They all thought they were going to die in this storm. Even those seasoned sailors, those who did this for a living were terrified and they thought they were going to die, but not Paul.

How in the world could Paul be so sure? Remember what the Lord told Paul in Acts 23:11, “**Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.**” God told him he was going to Rome to share his faith in Jesus and thus, nothing was going to stop that from happening, not even this violent storm that threatened this ship!

And in Acts chapter 27 we see more encouraging words as the angel of God spoke to Paul and encouraged him that they all will get through this, not one person on this ship will lose his life even though the ship will be destroyed.

That is faith in action; he trusted God and it encouraged him to go forward. Without faith it is easy to lose hope and when you lose hope you have nothing left!

Let me show you what I mean with this story. We are told,

A certain American prisoner held in North Viet Nam, led to believe that if he cooperated with his captors he would be set free, had done quite well despite two years in captivity. With this vision before him, he even became the leader of a prison thought-reform group. However, the day his vision dissolved and he realized he was being deceived, he curled up on his bunk, refused nourishment, and was dead in a couple of weeks. When faith in his vision was removed, he could no longer cope.

- R. Kent Hughes, Acts – The Church Afire, p. 341

But Paul's hope was in the Lord and the promises that God had given to him. It did not make the situation easier, the storm was violent and for 14 days the ship was tossed until it ran aground on a sand bar and all the passengers jumped ship and swam or used the boards of the ship that was breaking up to make it to shore. Amazingly, as God had promised Paul, all 276 people survived this deadly ordeal!

As we closed last time they were not sure what island they were on, where they landed, where this storm had blown them but as we will see tonight, they will find out the island they are on.

With that as our background, let's begin reading in Acts chapter 28, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us this evening as we study His Word.

ACTS 28**VERSE 1**

From the island of Crete, they were blown by this storm some 600 miles west to this tiny island of Malta, which is about seventeen miles long and nine miles wide. Also, it was located some 100 miles south of Sicily.

Now why didn't these experienced sailors recognize that this was the island of Malta? Because this is not where they would normally dock, not on this side of the island. Almost all the traffic to Malta came to the main port, called Valletta, located on the other side. And thus, they didn't recognize this side of the island. This area where they came ashore is now called St. Paul's Bay.

Interestingly enough, the name "**Malta**" means "refuge" and that is exactly what this place was for these men as they just spent some 14 days being tossed by this storm, not sure if they would live or die. In fact, many gave up hope of surviving until Paul encouraged them by telling them that God had told them that they would all live!

VERSE 2

In some of your Bibles they use the words "**barbarous people**" or "**barbarians**" for these island people, and that truly gives the wrong impression.

This is not a derogatory name or is it speaking of a primitive people, but simply, the Greeks called those people who didn't have as their native language Greek or Latin this term.

What I want you to notice is the kindness they showed to these shipwrecked men. It was still raining, it was cold, and they made a fire to warm them and dry them off, not to have them for dinner.

Paul put it like this in Colossians 3:12-17 regarding kindness, what flows from our lives. He wrote, **“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”**

Why is this so important? Because it is reflecting the nature of God and it is far different than what the world has to offer. Our love, our kindness towards others is not based upon their goodness to us, but upon God’s love towards us that is then manifested in our lives. At least it should be. The reason being, is that **“whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”** Colossians 3:17.

VERSES 3-5

Think about what we are seeing here. Here is Paul, this great man of God, and he is gathering wood for the fire. Now, keep in mind that there were scores of people that were on that ship with Paul, 276 passengers, prisoners and crew that could have done the job and maybe they were even more suited for the job than Paul. But, as we can see, Paul's servant heart was always evident.

And you can look through the Scriptures and see that as you look at Paul's life you always see him serving.

And, like I have said, he is gathering wood for the fire. Why do you think he went ahead and did that?

I believe he was following the Lord's example for in Mark 10:45 Jesus tells us, "**For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**" In other words, there was a need, they needed more wood for the fire, and instead of sitting around waiting for someone else to get the wood, Paul got the wood. A true servant of God!

Make no mistake about it, as followers of Jesus we too need to get our hands dirty, there is no job, no work that is too small for us to do or below us to do.

The thing is we can become too big in our own minds for God to use us at all!

It is as James said, the correct perspective, "**Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.**" James 4:10.

Now, as Paul is serving a viper or poisonous snake bites him!

And what do we see Paul do? "***God, I can't believe this. First this shipwreck and now bitten by this deadly snake! Really? Give me a break!***"

No, that is not what Paul said. And as you look at what Luke tells us; Paul's reaction was not anger towards God, but he shook it off and kept working.

What happens when you are serving the Lord and something bites you? What is your reaction when something like this happens that seems so unfair? Do you get angry at God? Do you get angry at the people? Do you stop serving?

Learn and live the example of Paul, just shake it off and keep serving.

Keep in mind that the islanders were watching all that was going on and as they witnessed Paul getting bit by this poisonous snake, when they saw what happened to Paul, they feel he is getting what he deserved. In other words, he must be a horrible criminal and even though he was spared by the seas, justice will prevail!

VERSE 6

So as the people of this island watch Paul closely, waiting for him to die, and he doesn't, their conclusion changes.

No, Paul was not a criminal and the gods were going to judge him. In fact, they come to the conclusion now that Paul is a god!

People can be very fickle in their views, like a baseball player who has a batting average of .350 and the crowds cheer him on until he goes in a slump and then the boo birds come out!

This can happen to us as Christians, in ministry, be careful, don't let the praise of men go to your head for that can quickly change.

When I first came up to Manitowoc there was a couple who loved me, and I loved them and still do.

And all they could do is give me praise at every Bible study, thanking me for coming up here until I didn't agree with them on an issue and then I was "of the Devil!"

Go figure. Serve the Lord and don't allow the praise of men or the condemnation of men to cause you to stop serving – ***YOU SERVE THE LORD!***

Paul put it like this in Colossians 3:22-24, "**Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.**"

We obey the Lord at all times, we serve the Lord and in our service to the Lord we bless men.

Now hear me out on this. I don't think persecution is the biggest problem for Christians. I think persecution strengthens our faith. What is the biggest problem for Christians is ***THE PRAISE OF MEN!*** Be careful, it has brought many Christians down!

VERSES 7-10

We are told here that Publius was the governor of this island. And notice the hospitality he showed these shipwrecked men.

It is out of this that Paul hears that the father of Publius was sick. It says that he was "**sick of a fever and dysentery.**"

What this could be was a malady known as Malta fever. It comes from a microorganism that is found in the milk of Maltese goats. And it is debilitating as the symptoms could last for some four months!

And as Paul find this out, he goes and prays for him and he was healed.

What I want you to notice is that Paul was not on some healing ministry. Not at all!

These doors of opportunity opened up as he was just serving the Lord, carrying sticks or whatever! God did the work, but Paul made himself ready and available for the work.

Now, as others saw this healing they also came to Paul and were healed!

Where these others miraculously healed? Maybe not, and the reason I say that is that the word for “**healed**” in verse 9 of Acts 28 is not the customary word that is used for a miraculous healing.

It could be speaking of getting medical attention for that is what this word literally means, “*to receive medical attention.*”

Keep in mind that according to Colossians 4:14 Luke was a physician and maybe he was giving medical treatment to the island people!

And as they left the island, notice how they people honored them. And I think the blessings that Paul and the other believers shared with them, they in turn wanted to bless them and thank them.

Now, let me ask you this. Why were they shipwrecked on this island, on Malta when God told Paul he was going to go to Rome?

Because God needed Paul to go to this tiny island and share with these people Jesus, to proclaim to them the Good News!

So this storm was not outside the will of God, outside of His control, God used it to bring about the salvation of these people.

In fact, tradition tells us that Publius was the first pastor of the church in Malta, whose beginning can be traced back to this time when Paul was shipwrecked there!

God's plans are beyond our understanding sometimes until we get on the other side!

Thus, the storm had been used by God, as are all the storms of our lives. Never forget that! God may be blowing you down a path, don't fight it, see what He is going to do in it!

VERSES 11-15

As we can see, the winter months passed and now it was more favorable to sail. So they boarded an Alexandrian grain ship that was ported there for the winter.

Why did Luke include that its figurehead was the Twin Brothers? Because Luke wants us to know that this was a historical event, it was real, and he specifies exactly what ship they traveled on.

Now in Greek mythology the Twin Brothers were Castor and Pollux, sons of Zeus and they were seen as the god's who protected sailors!

Maybe after their last sailing disaster the Centurion and the other sailors wanted to have some added protection as they traveled to Rome.

But let me say this. Folks, Jesus is all you need, He will see you safely through the storms of life and there will come a day where that storm will lead you home, into the arms of Jesus!

It is as Jesus said in John 10:27-30, "**My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one.**"

In Acts 28:12 we are told that their first stop was Syracuse, which was the capital city on the island of Sicily, which was located on the lower east side of the island, about 100 miles or so away.

After 3 days they sailed to Rhenium which was on the southern tip of the Italian peninsula, or the toe of Italy!

As they waited the winds became favorable once again and they sailed to Puteoli, an important commercial port in Italy and still some 150 miles from Rome.

This city of Puteoli had some 100,000 people during Paul's day, so it was not small at all. What did Paul do there for seven days?

We are told that they “**. . . found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. . .**” Acts 28:14.

Now we may read this and not think much about what was going on there in Rome. But look at what we are told. There were Christians already in Rome and they know of Paul, how?

Because a few years earlier Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans, which we will be studying next, and thus, it was like they already knew Paul.

The Gospel is moving out just as Jesus said.

Bruce puts things in perspective for us when he says, “Luke is far from giving the impression that Paul was the first person to bring the gospel to Rome . . . the presence of those Christians – *the brothers*, as Luke calls them – provides evidence enough that the gospel had reached Rome already.”

As we get to Acts 28:15 we see that their journey to Rome was by foot and as word spread that Paul was coming to Rome some of the believers from Rome came down to meet him along the Appian Way, a Roman road that lead to and from Rome.

Thus, as Paul is in Appi Forum, some 43 miles from Rome, brothers are waiting for Paul to greet him.

As he travels another 10 miles to Three Inns or Three Taverns as some of your Bibles may say, they again greet Paul, and now they are only 33 miles from Rome.

What did this do for Paul, having believers coming out to meet him?

We are told, “**. . . When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.**” Acts 28:15.

Folks, take the time to meet people, talk with them, give them a hug, it will encourage them!

It is as Paul said in Hebrews 10:24-25, “**And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.**” Stir people up, encourage them!

VERSE 16

As they arrived in Rome, just as God promised Paul, Julius places the other prisoners in prison and Paul is under house arrest, chained to a soldier day and night!

Their shifts would be every 4 to 6 hours so Paul would have 4 to 6 men in a 24-hour period chained to him; they couldn't run away as he shared his faith like people do with us today!

Of this Bruce tells us, “To this soldier he would be lightly chained by the wrist . . . the soldier would be relieved every four hours or so, but for Paul there was no comparable relief.”

And notice what Paul says in his letter to the Philippians as he is in Rome under house arrest, **“But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”** Philippians 1:12-14.

Here is the amazing thing to me. The guards are getting saved, so much so that as he closes this epistle to the Philippians he says, **“All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar’s household.”** Philippians 4:24.

Not only were unbelievers coming to the faith, but the believers are strengthened in the faith by Paul’s faith – it has given them a boldness to share their faith with others.

You see, most lessons are caught and not taught! What are people catching from you?

VERSES 17-20

As was Paul’s custom, he spoke to the Jews first about Jesus. And that is what we see here. Only after three days Paul calls the Jews in Rome together to hear him out.

And Paul tells them that he has done nothing wrong, the only reason he is there in Rome was because the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem wanted him dead, and so he appealed to Caesar.

And we see Paul tell them that the reason he is chained is because he believed in **“the hope of Israel.”**

What is the hope of Israel? You don’t have to be a theologian to figure that one out, the hope of Israel is the Messiah, it is Jesus!

And that truly was the reason he was in prison, in chains.

The thing is, the Jewish Scriptures spoke of the coming Messiah; His birthplace, His heritage, His life, His death, His resurrection, and-so-on. Of this day the Jews missed because they rejected Jesus.

In fact, Jesus said in Luke 19:42-44, as He drew near the city of Jerusalem, looking down upon it from the Mount of Olives, **“If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”**

That is not only the hope of Israel, Jesus, but for you and me, for the world, Jesus is the only hope there is, He is the Good News!

It is as Jesus Himself said in John 3:16-21, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”**

And as much as judgment was coming for the Jews in Jerusalem, only some 10 years from this time and Titus and the Romans will come in and level the city and the Temple, so too is judgment coming for the people of this world! It is time to wake up and come to the Savior for He is the only hope for this world and for our lives!

VERSES 21-22

As you read these verses you can clearly see that the religious leaders who accused Paul in Jerusalem and Caesarea made no effort to send ahead documents stating their case against Paul. Why didn't they make their case? I think they knew their case was hopeless.

Now it is clear that these Jews in Rome did not hear anything about Paul but what they did hear and know about was this sect called the Way or Christianity, those who were following Jesus!

And this sect, which they saw as an offshoot of Judaism, is now spreading like wildfire and they are curious, they want to know more about it.

It doesn't take much of a spark to set a forest ablaze and it doesn't take much faith to spread like a wildfire. May we have that kind of faith that others catch, and it spreads far and wide. A faith in Jesus that is caught!

VERSES 23-24

Paul has his opportunity with these Jews living in Rome and he spends from “**morning till evening**” sharing Christ with them from the Scriptures!

I find that interesting. Paul did not share Jesus from a book or this or that, but from the Scriptures. May we learn that lesson for the Word of God is living and powerful and is able to change lives!

Also, keep in mind that for the Jews, they saw the Kingdom of God as being political, at least at this time. They were looking for the Messiah to free them from the Roman bondage they were under.

And yes, there is coming a day called the Kingdom Age where Jesus will rule and reign for 1,000 years from the throne of David, but not yet.

You see, the first time Jesus came He did so as the Suffering Servant to pay in full the penalty for our sins.

We are now living in a time called the Church Age, but when that comes to an end there will be a seven-year Tribulation Period where God pours out His wrath upon a Christ rejecting world, and then Jesus will return as the reigning King! The Tribulation Period begins after the Rapture of the Church as the Bride of Christ, believers, are caught up in to meet Him in the air.

Thus, Paul is sharing with them from the Scriptures and he spoke to them all day!

In verse 24 of Acts chapter 28, the word “**persuading**” in the Greek is a verb in the imperfect tense and thus can be translated, “*began to be persuaded*” or “*began to be convinced.*”

How did Paul do this? Maybe Paul took them to Genesis chapter 22 and the sacrifice of another father of his only son as a picture of what God the Father would do with His only begotten Son, Jesus some 2,000 years later on Mount Moriah.

Then maybe to Leviticus chapter 14 as God provides a cleansing for a leper, which is an incurable disease like sin and the blood of an animal would be sprinkled over them pronouncing them clean just as the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all our sins and we are clean!

Then maybe to Psalm 22 which gives us a picture of Jesus hanging on the cross of Calvary some 1,000 years before the event took place!

Then he may have gone to Micah chapter 5 which speaks of the birthplace of the Messiah.

Daniel chapter 9 gives to us the exact day that Jesus would ride through Jerusalem as Messiah the Prince, April 6, 32 A. D., and-so-on. Paul spent all day sharing Jesus with these Jews from the Old Testament Scriptures.

Then we see the results of Paul sharing Jesus with them. Some believed, and some did not.

That is true today just as it was back then. As we share our faith some will believe, and others won't.

You see, the word "**believe**" is not a noun, it is a verb, it speaks of action on our part and if we don't put into practice what we believe, then our faith is empty, it is dead!

It is as Jesus said in John 13:17, "**If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.**"

Or what James said, "**But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.**" James 1:22.

Good works don't save us, Jesus does. But our good works are the evidence for our faith! It shows that our faith is real!

VERSES 25-27

Now picture what is going on here. Some of the Jews believed what Paul was saying and some didn't. And I think you can see that those who were persuaded and those who disbelieved started arguing among themselves.

And as Paul heard this he shares what the prophet Isaiah said, and we will deal with that in a minute.

But as Paul sees the hardness of their hearts, on some of them, he tells them that the Holy Spirit spoke of them. In other words, Paul believed that the Holy Spirit is the Author of the Bible and that He used men as instruments to write these words. Tragically, many no longer believe that to be true because their hearts are hard towards God!

But remember what Paul said in II Timothy 3:16-17, "**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.**"

That does not change, it is the truth, all of it, from Genesis to Revelation!

And as Paul quotes out of Isaiah to show them that the only reason they have rejected Jesus as their Messiah is because of the hardness of their hearts, keep in mind that he was not the only one who used this passage.

Let me show you what I mean.

Jesus had used this passage in connection with His parables of the kingdom (Matthew 13:13-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10).

The Apostle John in his Gospel applied them to Israel (John 12:39-40).

And Paul quoted them in his Roman epistle (Rom. 11:7-8).

There are many people today who listen to what the Scriptures are saying and yet, they really are not hearing. They are dull to the things of God and thus, their lives are unchanged. They have not made that commitment to Christ and that is tragic!

And please understand that it isn't that God doesn't want to heal them, it is just they don't want to receive Him into their lives so that they may be healed, they may be saved.

It is as Paul said in Romans 11:7-10, **“What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. Just as it is written: ‘God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day.’ And David says: ‘Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, And bow down their back always.’”**

As you continue to harden your heart to the things of God, He will make firm what you desire, and you can't blame Him, He is only giving you what you want! Don't harden yourself to God, He wants to touch you and heal you, and I pray that you will allow Him to!

VERSE 28

Paul hits them hard here by telling them that since they have rejected the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that God has now sent him to preach to the Gentiles. And not only will they hear it, but they will receive the Gospel. And we have seen that in our study through the book of Acts!

And let me say this. It is not that the Gentiles are second best, for even in the Old Testament we see that salvation was to come to the Gentiles.

It is that God had made the Jewish people a nation from which the Messiah was to come and has come through. But they have rejected the Messiah. And as you read through the Scriptures you can see that God wanted to use the Jews to show the Gentiles the way to God, but they refused and rejected the Messiah. Thus, God is now going to use the Gentiles to show the Jews the way to God!

VERSE 29

Keep in mind that the Jews did not look with favor towards the Gentiles. There was great animosity between these two groups of people.

So when Paul said that he was going to the Gentiles to bring this gift of salvation, the Jews began to argue with each other over this issue.

Some were seeing the grace of God being extended to the Gentiles, those who had come to Christ. The others were fighting against this, those who rejected Him.

It is as Paul said in II Corinthians 2:16, **“To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. . . .”**

You can argue about Jesus, debate about Jesus all your life and you still won't be saved, you must receive Him into your life.

Some will receive what we say and to them we will be the aroma of life, and those who reject Jesus, our message will be the aroma of death!

VERSE 30-31

Paul was in Rome for two years, probably waiting for a court date to open up as Rome was backlogged with cases for Nero to hear.

Now, what did Paul do those two years he was under house arrest in Rome? Paul did not sit and complain about the situation he was in – he just continued to serve the Lord. He ministered to people who came to him. He ministered to the guards that were chained to him. And he wrote what is known as the prison epistles: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon and Philippians.

The time frame here is around 62 A. D. and Paul has his day with Nero, he shares Jesus with the leader of Rome and then I believe he is released after his two years.

Keep in mind that Rome had no charges against him, so Nero let him go.

What happened then? John MacArthur tells us from his commentary on I Timothy what Paul did after he was released from this Roman prison: “Following his release from his first imprisonment, Paul revisited some of the key churches in which he had ministered, including Ephesus. He then went to Macedonia, leaving Timothy behind to deal with some problems in the Ephesian church (1 Tim 1:3). From Macedonia, Paul wrote this letter, giving Timothy further instructions to help him carry out this task. At about this time (A.D. 63-64), he wrote Titus, who was engaged in ministry on the island of Crete. Rearrested in connection with the outbreak of Nero’s persecution, Paul wrote his final letter (2 Timothy) while in prison awaiting execution (ca. A.D. 66).”

What about this man named Nero? Yes, Nero was a man who becomes a Devil you might say. His persecution of Christians was insane. Nero was so bad, his destruction of so many Christians, placing them in animal skins for lions to attack them, burning them on poles as he rode through the streets naked in his chariot, that many early Christians thought Nero would return as the Antichrist!

And I believe it was the witness of Paul, that was so clear that Nero could not deny Jesus, but he did, and it is after this it seems like he is possessed by demons. His actions are beyond belief!

Of this man, Nero, John MacArthur said in his commentary on II Timothy, “A few years earlier (A.D. 64), Nero had ordered the torching of his own capital city of Rome, which burned furiously for six days and nights. Not only the wooden shacks of the poor but also the stone mansions of the rich, the massive public buildings, and the magnificent pagan temples and shrines were gutted. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote, ‘But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor and the propitiations of the gods did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order by Nero. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace.’ . . . But by the time of this epistle, some five or six years later (A.D. 66), he was in chains (2 Tim 1:16), languishing in a Roman prison and treated as a criminal (2:9) - with little light to read or write by, no sanitation, and no prospect of relief except by death. Whereas in his first imprisonment he had a measure of comfort and was granted some freedom, he was now confined in a dank and perhaps crowded dungeon. It is remarkable that, in addition to witnessing to his fellow inmates, he was able to write letters.”

That was Paul, “**. . . none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with Joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.**” Acts 20:24.

Let me share this with you. We are told,

During the gymnastics portion of the 1976 Olympics a Japanese athlete broke his leg during one of his routines, and everyone thought he was finished. As the competition turned out, the last day's performances would determine whether the championship went to the Japanese or the Russians. Despite the fact that his leg was broken, the injured athlete mounted the rings for a final performance, and it was sparkling. The look of pride on his face as he ran through the exercise was magnificent. But there was also his dismount, landing on his broken leg. His fighting spirit made him indomitable [unconquerable]. With his goal firmly in mind, he refused to quit, no matter how severe the pain.

- R. Kent Hughes, Acts – The Church Afire, p. 343

This man did this for a perishable crown you might say. But what about us? What stops us from going forward and serving the Lord. Is it because of a cloudy day, maybe rain, snow, I just don't feel like it, or whatever?

May we boldly go forward, no matter if we are tired, not feeling well, and do the work! May we be like Paul and may we say, “**... none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with Joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.**” Acts 20:24.

Our prayer should be, “Lord give us the power to do great things for you!”

Now, as we conclude this great book, remember what Jesus said in Acts 1:8, “**But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**”

As we have seen, that has happened and in reality, the book of Acts does not end with chapter 28 but continues on through the lives of those who love the Lord and are professing the Gospel message, you and me!

We, in a sense, are continuing to write the book of Acts as the Gospel message continues to go to the uttermost parts of the world!

Mrs. J. Shields tells us, “Someone has said that the Gospel in the first century was carried by a good system. It was called the teleperson system, and it truly got results, better than we do today with our telephones, televisions, and so on. The woman of Samaria carried the Gospel after her meeting with Christ by the teleperson system. It is said that ‘many of the Samaritans . . . believed on Him for the saying of the woman.’ (John 4:39).”

Remember what I said as we opened up our study in the book of Acts. The book of Acts gives to us the birth and growth of the church from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth. And it was done not by the power of man but by the power of God’s Spirit enabling man to move the Gospel message forward and may we, by the power of God’s Spirit continue the work.

May we trust in Jesus and move forth in the power of the Holy Spirit. May we believe what Paul said, “**Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.**” Ephesians 3:20-21.