

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Story That Never Ends

Scripture: Acts 28:17-31

Code: 1802

If you will take your Bible and look at the 28th chapter of Acts this morning. We are in our study of the book of Acts drawing to a conclusion. We'll be looking at the very end of the book, Acts 28:17 to 31. I trust as we complete this book this will not be the completion of your study but perhaps just the foundation on which you will future study the book with great benefit and blessing.

Now the paragraph that we're going to look at is the end, really, of the first chapter of the history of the church. The Holy Spirit has given us in the book of Acts the first historical look at the early church. And it comes to a conclusion, the record does, here in 28.

Going back to the very beginning you'll remember that the book began when our Lord Jesus Christ sent the Holy Spirit and said You shall be witnesses unto Me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost part of the earth. And that became the format for the book of Acts. The gospel began in Jerusalem then throughout all Judea and then spread to Samaria and finally to the uttermost part of the earth. We have seen the church go from Jerusalem through Judea to throughout Samaria and all the way through the world to the city of Rome.

Now at this point the record ceases. But I hasten to add the story does not end. And so we've entitled the message this morning the Story That has No End. It's still going on and the story of the church will go on throughout all eternity for it does not end. In fact, right now in 1975 the month of February we are writing the continuation of the book of Acts as the Spirit of God continues to build the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The book of Acts, then, is in a very real sense an unfinished book. It ends without an ending. In fact, as you look at verse 30 and at the very end it ends so abruptly that many have thought that there was a lost chapter or at least a lost paragraph. Verse 30 says, "And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no man forbidding him." And there it ends. We don't hear what ever happened to Paul. We don't hear what happened at the end of the two years. We don't hear what happened in the growth of the church in Rome. It seems to be very, very incomplete. And I think this is by design of the Holy Spirit. It is the story that has no end. It just stops it doesn't end. The record just ceases to be written, the story goes on. And as we have journeyed through the book of Acts, we've traveled many miles, back and forth, back and forth with Peter and John around the city of Jerusalem, from one spot to another. Then, back and forth on a greater scale with the Apostle Paul from one city, from one country to another. Finally we arrive in the city of Rome. All the way from the three-thousand who were saved at

Pentecost to those who will believe right here in the last paragraph of chapter 28. We saw the unity of the church as it was born in the book of Acts in chapter 2 we saw the fellowship of the church as it was exhibited in the world. We saw then the reaction of the Jewish leaders and the consequent persecution that broke out which resulted in the spread of the gospel and the conversion of the Apostle Paul. We've seen how the church has spread and finally reached the Imperial Mistress of the world, the city of Rome.

It is incomplete in a sense but there's enough here, enough has been written to reveal the source of power for the church who is the Holy Spirit. Enough has been written to reveal the pattern of blessing for the church, that is to walk in the Spirit. Enough has been written to indicate the approach of evangelism for the church, that is to declare Jesus Christ. Enough has been written to warn of the perils to the church, talking about sin and discipline and judgment. And enough has been written to establish the priorities of the church to teach the Word and to reach those who do not know Christ. There is enough here to see, by example, what the church is to be, as you see in Ephesians, 1-2 Timothy, and Titus what the church is to be by precept and principle.

And now we come to the last page. The church has spread to Rome and Paul finally has arrived there after many years of longing.

Now as we approach verse 17 let's just give a little bit of a background on what Rome is like when Paul arrives. Verse 16 tells us that he came to Rome. And after, of course, the journey across the Mediterranean and all of the things he endured in that, he was glad to be there and the saints welcomed him, they met him and they came out as far as 43 miles to the city to greet him. He's encouraged and he arrives in this great imperial city. Now just a couple of things we should know about Rome so we get an idea of what he was facing. Historically speaking it's pretty evident by this time in the golden days of the imperial city were long gone. Rome was on the way down by this time. The dictators of Rome had usurped the power of the people and what had begun as a republic was now dead. It had turned into a despotism. The emperors had ceased more and more power and this man who was now the emperor was maybe the worst of all, his name was Nero. In fact, when Paul arrived Nero would have probably been no more than 25 years old but already his hands were bloodied with the murder of his own mother. Which probably occurred maybe a year before Paul arrived. And very likely, also the murder of his wife Octavia had also taken place. As Paul entered the city, he would have seen the temple of Jupiter which stood out and dominated the city. There was no Coliseum in Rome at the time of Paul.

He would have seen on the Palatine hill the three houses of Augustus Tiberius and Caligula which now had been tied together to make one formidable and massive palace the home of Nero. He would have seen the great temple of Mars. And all of this would have spoken to him of the degeneracy and the idolatry and paganism of this great city.

Rome had become the center of paganism and the center of decadence and it was on its way down. The population of Rome at the time when Paul arrived would be approximately 2 million people. Two million people confined to a very small area. Historians tell us that one million of them were slaves and the other million of them were known as citizens. That is they were legitimate citizens. The vast majority of them were absolutely penniless, paupers who slept in the streets and who slept upon the parapets and whatever else they could find outdoors in the city of Rome because they had absolutely nothing. But they were citizens and they had citizenship and consequently they lorded it over the slaves. But nearly all of the two-million people were absolute paupers both the slaves and the citizens and all of the money resided in the hands of the very few. There were 700 senators once there was a thousand but that had begun to degenerate. There were 10,000 knights 15,000 soldiers and then a handful or so of dignitaries and that was pretty much it. And all of the finances and all of the power rested with those people and the mass of the two-million people existed in abject poverty. This bred all kinds of decadence. The great mass of paupers who were even proud of their citizenship held the slaves in contempt beneath them. And, of course, there were constant slave revolts. Thousands of these poor people had no homes and their lives were totally amoral, into this melee of depraved, and deprived humanity came the Apostle Paul, the messenger of the Lord Jesus Christ. And his interest in Rome was not sociological, it was not economic, it was not cultural it was purely evangelism. He desired to win them to Jesus Christ and to mature the Christian. Now for the time that he was in Rome he was chained to a guard. Somewhere in a house in the middle of those two-million people this apostle continued to minister in chains. Now operating as a prisoner to him was no problem he learned how to do that very well. In fact, it was an advantage in many ways. The book of Acts, then, closes with Paul in chains in the midst of this tremendous mission field and his first approach at evangelism is recorded for us beginning in verse 17. I think it's kind of fitting as we look at this we'll see it, as we note evangelism is what it's all about in this last paragraph, it's kind of fitting.

The book of Acts should really end with an evangelism effort, shouldn't it, because that's what it's really been all about. The story isn't over, we're still continuing the evangelism that began in the book of Acts. And my prayer certainly is, as yours must be, that the evangelism that begins in the book of Acts that surges through the book of Acts and is included in the last chapter of Acts would also be included in our lives as well.

Now as we go through the text I'm just going to give you a simple little outline there and then you'll notice on the outline that you have in your bulletin that at the very end I'm going to draw a summary that will help us to pull the whole passage into perspective. I want us to look at the passage from the standpoint of its historical narrative and then I want to look at it from the standpoint of its emphasis and perspective on evangelism. And we'll do that in conclusion.

Now the text falls into five sections, the first one is the introduction. Paul introduces himself to the city. Now he's arrived there, he wants to have an impact on the total city, it's pretty difficult to have an

impact on 2 million people but Paul's got some strategy. And you'll notice what he does in the beginning in verses 17 through 20.

He introduces himself first of all to the Jews. "And it came to pass that after three days", you'll notice that he never lets any grass grow under his feet. "Paul called the chief of the Jews together." Now that is not one person that is many of them. All of the important leaders of the synagogues. And historians have told us there's anywhere from 12 down to 7 synagogues operating in Rome at this time in history. Each of those synagogues would have some chief men, they were also wealthy trade merchants and other people who were of an official character in the city of Rome who were Jewish which would have been in on this. So Paul called the chief of the Jews together. "And when they were come together he said unto them, Men and brethren though I have committed nothing against the people or customs of our fathers yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans." And here is Paul's pattern as always, we see that whenever he has gone to a city previously to whom did he go first? To the Jews. He always went to the Jews because if he went to the Gentiles first he couldn't go to the Jews because he would have alienated himself from them. He always went to the Jews first because that was where he would find an open door. If he goes to the Gentiles first then the door of the Jews would be closed to him because they don't want to be in on anything that is second-hand, especially having gone to Gentiles first. So his approach was always to the Jew. I think we ought to note here that Paul though he has been accused by many Jews throughout history of anti-Semitism had no such attitude. And although he has been maligned and persecuted and threatened and plotted against and beaten up and abused by the Jews for the past several years before he gets to Rome he feels no animosity and he goes directly to them at the very beginning of his time in Rome. Again showing us the love that the man had for Israel. He says in Romans 9:1, I think this bears it out, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not. My conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart for I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." There he makes the testimony clear that he loves Israel to the place where he could almost wish himself accursed for their benefit. In 10:1 of Romans he says, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved." And so the same love burns in his heart for Israel. It has never been daunted, it has never been shaded, it has never been extinguished by all that he has endured by their hands. He calls together the chief of the Jews.

Now it was obvious that he couldn't go to a synagogue to speak to them so he had to have them come to him. And I think it's interesting that they did come. They had undoubtedly a deep interest in the man, they certainly had heard about him. He was by now a very popular person. In addition to that, he was a very unpopular person in the Roman world and in the Jewish world. He had turned about every synagogue that he had come to by winning some people to Jesus Christ and the word had certainly reached these Jews at Rome. So they were interested in the man. They were also interested in what he had to say about Messiah. He was the one who was going around with all this Messianic information and certainly the Messianic issue was interesting to them. And so evidently

their interest was peaked and they were willing to meet with him. A footnote on this would be to remember that back in chapter 1? there was the indication that the Jews had been banished from Rome. Apparently the banishment of Claudius had run out under Nero and they were allowed back in because they're there. So the Apostle Paul, then, confronts the leaders of the Jews. Now he recognizes that he has a very delicate matter on his hands. He must explain his circumstances as a prisoner. He must show that he is innocent of any charges that have been laid against him by the Jews and at the same time he must not alienate his Jewish audience. Now that's difficult. How does he do it? Middle of the verse, "Men and brethren", and the brethren has not to do with Christians but Jewish brethren, "though I have committed nothing against the people", that is the Jews, "or the customs of our fathers yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans." He gives a brief defense and I said to you many months ago now that he would give six defenses from the time that he was taken as a prisoner in the temple ground there in Jerusalem back in chapter 21. This is the sixth, this is the final defense since his arrest in Jerusalem. He says I have committed nothing against the people or customs of our fathers. He had not violated Jewish law, he had not injured the Jewish people. He had done absolutely nothing he was innocent of any crime. His imprisonment though caused by Jewish antagonism against him did not reflect any crime against the Jewish people that is anti-Semitism or against the customs of the people, the Law of God or God Himself. The Jews had accused him of these things.

Remember that they had accused him of sedition that he was a reactionary against the Roman government. They had accused him of sectarianism, you remember back in chapter 21 they had said he was a leader in the sect of the Nazarenes and tried to label him as a heretic. They had accused him of sacrilege and saying that he profaned the temple therefore blaspheming God. They repeated all those accusations in chapter 24. If you want to look at it for just a minute, you can look at chapter 24 verse 5, "A pestilent fellow a mover of sedition among the Jews throughout the world a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, gone about to profane the temple etc. etc." They said he was a public nuisance, a pest who was guilty of all of these crimes. You'll remember that he was taken before Felix and found to be innocent. He was then taken before the second Roman governor Festus and found to be innocent. He was then brought by Festus before the king, Agrippa, and again found to be innocent. All the trials that he endured proved his innocence even the melee in front of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem which ended up in a fight proved his innocence because they were split right down the middle as to whether he was guilty or not. It was a hung jury, if you will. The case therefore should have been thrown out.

But even though he was innocent all the way down the line and here he is a prisoner in Rome. It is not because he is guilty that he is a prisoner it is because the Romans were being blackmailed by the Jews.

In other words, if the Romans did not keep him in prison, if they did not prosecute him the Jews would lead an insurrection against Rome in Judea and that would be very bad. So the Roman governor

succumbed to the pressure of the Jewish leaders and kept Paul a prisoner.

Now verse 18 takes us a little further into his introduction as he talks to the elders of the Jews, the chief ones. Talking about the Romans, "Who when they had examined me", the Romans examined him, repeat they examined him, Felix, Festus and Agrippa, "Who when they had examined me would have let me go because there was no cause of death in me." He establishes right at the very beginning that in the eyes of the Roman government he is innocent. What he is saying is, This is a Jewish problem. The Jewish people have sent me here but in the eyes of the Roman law as I faced it there I am innocent. Through all that series of examinations in chapter 24 with Felix, in chapter 25 with Festus, in chapter 26 with Agrippa he was innocent. Why was he not freed? Verse 19; "But when the Jews spoke against it", or against me, "I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar." In other words, he says - Even though I was innocent the Jews kept the pressure on me so much so that my only escape was to appeal to Caesar and have this thing transferred to Rome with the hope that I might get a fair trial. They recognized, you'll remember, that he wasn't going to get any justice in Judea because of the Jewish pressure and so he did what every Roman citizen had the right to do he appealed his case to Rome. And he was then transported to Rome where his case was to be heard and he felt, perhaps, that justice could be attained there.

Now having said all of this might be kind of a bad thing because he really lays the onus on the Jews and he may be just "X-ing" himself out of any ministry so in order to kind of neutralize what he's just said he adds the bottom half of verse 19, "Not that I had anything to accuse my nation of." Now notice, this is really a very important thing He hastens to show that his defense is only that. It is only a defense. It is not offensive against the Jews. He's saying, I'm not condemning the Jews, I'm not attacking the Jews, I'm only defending myself. I have nothing against them, I'm not attacking back is what he's saying. He was no traitor to the natural cause of Judaism, he was a Jew in nationality and he was a Jew in interest, certainly he was a Jew in his special love for them. You'll notice that he says, I have nothing to accuse my nation of. What he's saying is, I am the accused not the accuser.

I have no bitterness toward Israel, I draw no accusation against them I only defend myself. And you remember back on all five of the defenses that we have heard of Paul, Paul has leveled no accusations against them; He has merely defended himself.

Verse 20: "For this cause, therefore, have I called for you to see you and speak with you because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain." Now here he hits the real issue. The antagonism was based on this point. It was the issue of the hope of Israel that got him into all this trouble. Who is the hope of Israel? Who is the hope of every Jew? Messiah. The hope of Israel was the Messiah. And along with the Messiah came the resurrection. And for preaching that Jesus was the Messiah and that Jesus rose from the dead and provided a resurrection then was the real issue that got him into trouble. For this reason am I in this chain, it is nothing that I have done against Israel, it is nothing for which Rome can convict me it is simply because I have proclaimed that Jesus is the hope of Israel, He

is the Messiah and He provides a resurrection.

Now to see what the hope of Israel refers to I want you to come back to chapter 23 for a minute and let me just show you a couple of things. Twenty-three six: "But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees", and this, of course, was when he was before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, "he cried out in the council, Men and brethren I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee", now watch, "of the hope even or also or and whichever, perhaps the best is even, of the hope even of the resurrection of the dead I am called in question." Now what was the hope of Israel here? Resurrection. Or perhaps he's saying of the hope and resurrection meaning the Messiah and the resurrection. But the point was this, the Jews knew that God had promised a Messiah and that that Messiah would bring a kingdom, and in order for the Jews that had already died to share in the kingdom there would have to be what? A resurrection. You go back into the Old Testament, for example, and you find this promise in Isaiah 26:19, "Thy dead men shall live together with My dead body shall they arise, awaken and sing ye that dwell in the dust for thy dew is like the dew of the herbs and the earth shall cast out the dead." And you see, this is all talking about the kingdom time, the Jews had the confidence from the words of Isaiah that there would be a resurrection in order for them to share the kingdom. So there was the hope of Israel that's the coming of Messiah and the resurrection so that they could enjoy His kingdom. Job 19:26, "Though after my skin worms destroy this body, says Job, yet in my flesh shall I see God." In Daniel 12:2; "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt." And so there was the promise that there would be resurrection. That they would awake to share the kingdom. And the Jews hope was in the coming of Messiah and the resurrection. In Acts 24:15 we find it again, Paul again speaking before Felix, "And have hope toward God", he says - I have hope toward God, "which they themselves also allow", in other words, the Jews also have this hope, "that there shall be a resurrection of the dead." Now chapter 26 verse 6, "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers." In other words, he talks about the hope again. What is the hope? Verse 7, "Unto which promise our 12 tribes earnestly serving God night and day, hope to come for which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews." What is the hope? "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?" The hope then is the Messiah and His resurrection. And the provision of resurrection for Messiah's people. Read Ezekiel 37 sometime, verses 11 through verse 14 and you'll read about the hope of the resurrection of the dead that the Israelites had.

So Paul says, now back to chapter 28, he says the reason that I am in chains is because I have been declaring that the Messiah has arrived He has risen from the dead and the resurrection has been provided for.

And I can imagine that when he said the things that he said in verse 20 when he said at the end, that the hope of Israel I am bound to this chain, he probably held the chain up and dangled it so they could see it. He was very constantly talking about that chain he had on. He wrote the book of

Ephesians, incidentally, at this very time when he was chained to this guy. And he says in Ephesians 6:20, "I am an ambassador in chains. In 2 Timothy 1:16, I think it is,"the Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain."

Repeatedly then he refers to the chain that he has which bound him to the Roman guard and thus we know that all through the two year period he was indeed bound. So he introduces himself and he says I am not here because I have been convicted of anything by the Jews even though they pursued the issue and I have nothing against them. I'm not here because I have been convicted of anything by the Romans--they would have let me go except for Jewish pressure. I have nothing against Israel. The only thing I have done is announce that the hope of Israel is come.

And thus the introduction.

Second point is interest. They showed tremendous interest in what he said. What Paul prayed for, I'm sure, was a basic openness at least a hearing, a willing ear from these Jews to begin with and it came in verse 21, listen; "They said unto him, We neither received letter out of Judea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came showed or spoke any harm of thee." Isn't this amazing? You know, we haven't heard a word of bad things about you out of Judea but we desire to hear of thee, verse 22, to what thou thinkest. "For as concerning the sect," that is Christianity, "we know that everywhere it is spoken against." All we hear is bad about Christianity, go ahead and defend it. Isn't it amazing that they had no word if this is the truth, and let's assume that it is, that we have received neither letters nor information from a person who has come from Judea to indicate anything about you.

No word on Paul. You say,How could this possibly be? Remember this, Paul's ship was probably the last ship. Right? To come from Judea to Rome. Why? Because it left really later than it should have left. And by the time it got through all of the terrible storms and was smashed off Malta and everything, there wouldn't be any other ships but that one very likely. Why? Because when Paul was finally going to be sent to Rome it was only a matter of days before he grabbed the first ship and was on his way. So Paul would have been on the first ship to Rome from that area. There couldn't have been anybody getting there any sooner. And of course, then when they had to spend the winter he probably picked up the closest ship and would have been there again before any messenger could have come--that's very possible. But in addition to that I think it's important to remember too that the Jews were probably not real anxious to pursue the case to Rome because they didn't have a case. Right? And they were probably somewhat satisfied just to have him out of Judea and so they didn't bother to send anybody with any word about it. And the attitude of these Jews is very diplomatic. They deny any knowledge of his case. No one had come and told them these things, and they were saying We're open to hear what it is that you have to say. The leaders of the Sanhedrin, as I say, probably didn't bother to come. They had been such miserable failures in front of the provincial rulers they weren't about to come across as a total flop in front of Caesar.

And, incidentally, I think an interesting thing to note is that the Roman government looked very, very harshly on somebody who prosecuted a case without strong evidence. And it would have been a very difficult thing to prosecute Paul who was a Roman citizen in the city of Rome especially when they didn't even have a case. And then to add to that a favorable information from Festus and Felix, there was no way they were going to come to Rome, there was no way they were going to make a stand against this man. So they say, - We haven't heard anything of you and we're interested in what you have to say about this sect that we hear everywhere spoken against. It has a bad reputation among us Jews. And I think they moderated that, I think they could have said which we despise and hate because they knew all about Christianity, believe that, folks. The church had already been established in Rome.

They were playing a little diplomacy here.

So all right, that leads us to the third section in our paragraph, or really two paragraphs, and that is the invitation. Having seen their openness and interest Paul, then, proceeds to give them a message and an invitation. He establishes a time for a great meeting, a day to make his presentation. All the Jewish leaders gather to hear him speak. And I think, it's kind of the fulfillment of Romans 1 where he said in verse 14, "I am debtor to the Greeks and the barbarians to the wise and to the unwise, so much as in me is I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are at Rome also for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. For it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew"...What?..."to the Jew first, and also to the Gentiles." And so here he is fulfilling Romans 1 and preaching to the Jews. Verse 23, "And when they had appointed him a day", they set up a time when they would all come back to wherever he was, "there came many to him into his lodging", whatever this house was, "to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets", and you'll notice how long the meeting lasted, "from morning to evening." That's early in the day till sundown of the day.

Now I think this is kind of an exciting time. The Apostle Paul wanted to get a hearing and he got it with all the leadership. We can surmise what he said but it says here that he said he expounded and testified the kingdom of God. And that would be the general rule of God with all of its features. Then he would zero in the kingdom on to this, persuading them concerning whom? Jesus, that Jesus is the King in the kingdom, that He is the Messiah. And the persuasion that he used was Old Testament prophets--out of the Law and the Prophets. Now this is Paul's pattern all through the book of Acts. He labors to prove the gospel of Jesus Christ is the true and necessary fulfillment of Israel's religion, of Old Testament history and the typology of Moses and Old Testament prophecy as it was spoken by the prophets. So he takes the Old Testament, the Jewish Scripture, and interprets the coming, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And I'm convinced, too, that it was not just a sermon, that it was a dialogue, that it was so much like his other things where he talked and interacted in response to their questioning.

So he declares the general truth, God's rule. Anytime you see the phrase the kingdom of God it's general meaning is the rule of God and it's extended to include the whole universe and all of God's plans and all of God's operations. And having then discussed the general rule of God he makes it specific as he zeroes in on Jesus as the Messiah. Now, in a sense, I think it's kind of a gracious thing that he talks to them about the kingdom. In the gospels, you'll remember, Jesus had offered them the kingdom. Jesus had told them the kingdom was theirs if they would accept the King. And Jesus authenticated the presentation of the kingdom by signs and wonders. That's exactly what the apostles did as well in the book of Acts. They represented the kingdom to Israel and again authenticated it by signs and wonders and miracles. The condition for the kingdom was the same--repent and have faith in Jesus Christ.

Look at the response in verse 24; "And some believed the things that were spoken and some believed not." Now there you have the division that always comes in the preaching of the gospel. Some believe and some believe not. And I think this reminds us again too that the response to the gospel of Jesus Christ is based upon a man's own faith. The way to chronicle what happened was simply to say whether they believed or didn't believe. Man is responsible for faith. Both are in the imperfect tense which means continuous progressive actions--and some were in the process of continuing to believe, some were in the process of continuing to disbelieve. So some believed. And what an exciting time it must have been to see these Jewish people come to know their Messiah. To see--three days he's been there; he sets up a meeting on that day. There is faith in Israel, tremendous.

And so they were divided in those who believed and those who did not. And that's always the way it's been. I was thinking, you know, just in looking at that, that that's always the way it has to be. The book of Acts is that way. We see that even in our own day.

We see it historically, in the past. Chapter 14, verse 4, "The multitude of the city was divided. Part held with the Jews, part held with the apostles." That's what happened in Iconium. We go over to chapter 17 of Acts, and verse 4, and some of them believed and consorted with Paul and Silas (verse 5), but the Jews who believed not were moved with envy.

You go to chapter 18, verse 6, "And when they opposed themselves and blasphemed he shook his raiment and said unto them, 'Your blood be on your heads, I'm clean, from now on I will go to the Gentiles.' And he departed from there, entered a certain man's house named Titus Justus, one who worshipped God, whose house was next to the synagogue. And And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house and many of the Corinthians hearing believed and were baptized." So you have again, the division that comes in the preaching of the gospel. Chapter 19 rechronicles it again. Read verse 8, "He went to the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months", it says, "some were hardened and believed not but some believed." This is constantly the

pattern, constantly the way it is. And the issue is whether a man believes or not, whether or not a man responds in faith to Jesus Christ. That's the simplicity of salvation. It's only a question of believing.

The unbelief, I think here, is very significant. Some believed and some believed not. The Lord had been offered to them, that is to Israel, in the gospels, early in Acts and again in Acts, all through Acts constantly constantly the Jew first, to the Jew first, constant rejection. There never was that national acceptance, there was always only the small remnant that believed. Because of that we come to point four in our outline, which we've called inversion. Inversion means reversal in the dictionary. The gospel came to the Jew first, but all of a sudden tragically, that is immediately, reversed right here. The Spirit of God speaks for the fourth time of prophecy from Isaiah. This is the fourth time it's been used in Scripture. And there are...I can't think of many Scriptures that are used repeatedly like this. One is, of course, Habakkuk: "the just shall live by his faith." This is another one. There are rare, rare Scriptures indeed that are ever referred to or proclaimed four times. That kind of repetition, but this one is. We find the inversion beginning in verse 25 and going through verse 27. Now let me preface reading that by saying this, the whole book of Acts is the story of God's final striving with the Hebrew people. From the time that God called Abraham and founded the nation He has been striving with Israel. Historically throughout all of the Old Testament Israel failed to live up to the information and the revelation that they had. They grieved the heart of God, they wounded His heart, they broke His heart and judgment after judgment after judgment after judgment came. There were several captivities that came. One tragic note in the history of Israel was when the entire northern kingdom just disintegrated. Israel was just continually failing to live up to the covenant with God. And yet God was gracious and Christ finally came and first John the Baptist announced it to Israel. Then Christ came first to Israel. Then at the day of Pentecost, when the church was born, the Spirit of God was sent to the midst of Israel. As the church scattered the apostle Paul went into town and he went first to Israel into the synagogues. And finally we now come to Rome, the last solemn, abandonment of Israel. It was only 10 years later or less from the record of this passage that the Roman eagles stormed into Jerusalem and destroyed Judaism for good.

What we have today, which is called Judaism, is only a faint shadow of what Judaism was. It was destroyed in 70 A.D. This is the last solemn, biblical warning to Israel. This is the last time God ever went to the Jew first, right here.

Now the words that Paul quotes in this passage are taken from Isaiah 6. Isaiah spoke them at a time when Israel was in sin. Our Lord Jesus spoke them in Matthew 13 showing the kingdom would be taken from Israel. John quotes the same words in John chapter 12, and now Paul quotes them. Isaiah, Jesus, John, and Paul all quote the very same words.

What do they say? Look at verse 25; "And when they had agreed not among themselves, they departed." Boy, that is so tragic. That is the last Biblical abandonment of Israel. After Paul had spoken one word here's what drove them away; "Well spoke the Holy Spirit by Isaiah, the prophet unto our

fathers." There's a note on inspiration, the Holy Spirit speaking through Isaiah. This is what He said; "Go unto this people and hearing you shall hear and not understand and seeing you shall see and not perceive for the heart of this people is become fat or obtuse, and their ears are dull of hearing and their eyes have they closed lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and should be converted and I should heal them." You'll notice verse 27 says, "They closed their ears, they closed their eyes they sealed up their understanding." Verse 27 says, "Now they can't hear, now they can't understand." What began as a willful act turned into the sovereignty of God. Israel rejected, willfully blinded themselves, willfully deafened themselves, willfully did not understand and consequently were tied to that kind of destiny as God sealed their ears, their eyes, and their minds. Turn for a minute with me to John 12 and I just want to show you the similar passage here and point some things out to you.

Jesus, you remember, came into the world, born of a virgin, God incarnate, lived in humility among men at Nazareth. After 30 obscure years He announced to Israel that He was God, the Messiah, the living Christ, the living water, the bread of life, the light of the world, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life and all of these titles are given to Him in the gospel of John. He substantiated all those claims by miracles and signs and matchless words and unsurpassed love. And you remember the response of Israel? They doubted Him, they denied Him, they rejected Him and finally they wanted Him dead and ultimately executed Him. In the final call to Israel came here in John 12:35; "Then Jesus said unto them, Yet is a little while the light is with you, walk while you have the light, lest darkness come upon you for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not where he goeth, while you have light believe in the light that you may be the sons of light." This is your time, Israel. The light is still here. Grab it before it's darkness. Jesus appeals to them. Verse 37; "But though He had done so many miracles before them yet they", what? "Believed not on Him." Inexcusable, so many miracles so much light. And here's the sovereign side, "In order that the saying of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled which he spoke, Lord who is believed our report to whom the arm of the Lord been bared, who seeing all that God has done believes." Not them, they didn't believe, "Therefore," verse 39, "they could not believe." You see? They did not, they could not. Notice it. Verse 37, Yet they believed not. Verse 39, they could not believe. You see, willful unbelief is turned into sovereign unbelief. He hath blinded their eyes, hardened their heart that they should not see with their eyes nor understand with their heart and be converted and I should heal them. Now what began as willful blindness turned into sovereign blindness. It's frightening. They did not in verse 37, and they could not in verse 39. He who will not believe may find some day that he cannot believe. You say, John, does this mean as in the end of the book of Acts, it's all over for Israel? The salvation of God, verse 28, is sent to the Gentile. Verse 27, that they can not be converted? They cannot be healed, Israel? God is through with Israel? No. I want you to look at Romans 9, I have to show you something that did happen but it wasn't permanent, thank God.

And in Romans 9 God says that there the unbelief of Israel has caused their setting aside. But verse 17, the Scripture says to Pharaoh, even for this same purpose have I raised thee up that I might show

My power in thee that My name might be declared to all the earth, therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy and whom He will He hardens." Here is God's sovereign act. God will save whom He will save. God will gain glory from whom He will gain glory. Now it will be the Gentiles, verse 25, I will call them My people who were not My people and her beloved who was not beloved. And here He says the Gentiles will take the place of Israel in the sense of salvation. Verse 30, "The Gentiles who follow not after righteousness have attained righteousness." Verse 31, "But Israel has failed." Now all of that to show that God turns to the Gentiles but notice carefully chapter 11 verse 17; "And if some of the branches be broken off", now the branches here are Israel and the root or the trunk is the blessing of God, "If some of the branches are broken off and thou being a wild olive tree were grafted in among them." In other words, the Gentile is the wild olive tree grafted into the trunk of God's blessing, the Jews are the ones cut off. Verse 18; "Boast not against the branches." In other words, just because the Gentiles have been grafted in is no cause for us to boast against the Jews. Verse 19, "Thou wilt say then, the branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Do you think you're better than the Jews? Well, because of unbelief they were broken off and you stand by faith. Be not high minded but fear for if God spared not the natural branches take heed lest He also spare not you. You see? Be careful that you don't become over much proud or God may just nut you off. "Behold, therefore, the goodness and severity of God on them who fell severity on toward thee goodness if you continue in His goodness otherwise thou shalt also be cut off."

And here he's talking about the total of the Gentiles. "And they also if they abide not still in unbelief shall be grafted in." Now notice that? Israel will be regrafted in if they believe. For God is able to graft them in again, for if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature and grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree, you're not even a normal olive tree, you're a wild one, - how much more shall these which are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree. Listen, the end of verse 25, Blindness in part has happened to Israel, only until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in, till the completion of the church. And so all Israel shall be saved. Listen, God will graft in Israel again. And so we see that He's not ultimately through with them because that would be to break His eternal covenant.

But for the time being God has set Israel aside, the kingdom is postponed and the Gentiles are drawn to Him. Verse 25, "Be it known, therefore, unto you that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles and they will hear it." Now this has happened over and over again in the book of Acts: chapter 11 verse 1, chapter 13 verse 46 and 47, chapter 14:27, 15 verse 14 to 19 and chapter 21 verse 19 we see this move to the Gentiles. Does this ruin God's plan? No. It didn't ruin His plan. God will restore Israel.

So we see the inversion, reversal. And we are the recipients of the blessing of that reversal. Gentiles who believe. That leads us to the fifth point, verse 25 says, "And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had great disputing among themselves." And then the last two verses - the incompleteness. These two verses don't complete the book it just isn't complete. Paul dwelt two years in

his own hired house received all that came in unto him. He had a measure of freedom. People came and went all the time. He was preaching the kingdom of God, teaching those things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence and no man did what? Forbidding it. He had absolute liberty. This isn't the end of the acts of the apostles. The name of the book is the Acts of the Apostles. This isn't the end. Paul goes on from here. John goes on at least another thirty years. This isn't the end of the story of the church, this is the beginning of it. We're writing it now. Maybe we're writing the last few chapters of the church on earth, but it's still going on. There he is two years proclaiming Christ and under the complacent eye of the Roman authority preaches the kingdom, teaches the things of Christ, talks about God's rule and the truth of God and who Messiah is. What interested me here as I read this was how in the world Paul got stuck there for two years if he was innocent. Why a two year period? What was he - why was the case dragging on? So I did a little research and I found some interesting things. Historians note that long delays were very common in first century trials in the Roman government because of the tremendous backup of trials that they had.

They had a court system something like ours and people kept getting stacked up and trials were put off only they didn't let them out, they kept them in jail. Also isn't it likely that the records of all of the information about him that must have been sent from the Roman governor in Judea had been lost in the shipwreck? And sending back to get more records and then sending the records back again was a many month problem. In addition to that Roman law required that the accusers or those that were prosecuting the case be in Rome to accuse him. And I told you before I have serious doubts whether any of those Jews would have come to Rome to persecute Paul because of the fact that they knew they had no case. Now it is most likely that there was eighteen month or a twenty-four month statutory period in which the prosecution must state his case. At the end of that time if the case had not been stated the prisoner would be released. It is my conviction at the end of those two years Paul was released. And for a period of time ministered yet then was made a prisoner again for the final time and that was the time in which he was beheaded. Roman law dealt very very, very harshly with unsuccessful prosecutions and so there just never was one. And so for two years he was free to minister. Those were busy two years. You know what he did in these two years? Led a whole bunch of people to Christ. We'll read that in a minute. He wrote the book of Colossians, he wrote the book of Philemon, he wrote the book of Ephesians and he wrote the book of Philippians in these four years.

Everybody came and went. In Colossians he tells them that Aristarchus was with him, Luke was with him, Mark is with him, Jesus Justus is with him, Epaphras is with him, Demas is with him. Later on he tells them Timothy is with him. He was having a terrific time. In Philippians he tells about what was going on, Philippians 1, he tells about the salvation that's going on and he's just having a great time. In chapter... well in verse 25 and 26 he further talks about his blessing and how the gospel is spreading. Chapter 2 verse 24 he says it's not going to be long and I'll come and see you Philippians. He apparently is realizing that the imprisonment is kind of winding down. His bonds verse 1--chapter 1:13--are being manifest in all the palace. Chapter 4, the saints of Caesar's household greet you. So people were being saved and great things were happening. He was then likely released, had a

ministry of travel, came back as a prisoner. In his final imprisonment he wrote 1,2 Timothy and Titus. Probably about four years later and outside on the road to Asia he was finally beheaded.

Let me sum this up this way. What does this teach us about evangelism? Just note these things, will you, on your outline?

Let me make a statement about. What do we learn about his effective evangelism? Few very important points. You can jot down the passages and read them yourself. Where he preached is told here. Where did he preach? Anywhere. He was a prisoner, verse 16 tells us. He had a chain on him, verse 20 tells us. He was in a household, verse 23 tells us. Verse 30 tells us he dwelt in his own hired house always preaching, verse 31 says. There was no restriction as to where the pulpit was.

Where did he preach? Wherever he was. If he was in a prison, he preach there. If he was in a marketplace, he preached there. If he was in a synagogue, he preached there. It didn't matter where he was. Evangelism is something that goes on anywhere. And how did he preach? I'm going to give you three thoughts. Number one, he preached lovingly. Notice verses 17 to 20. Remember how conciliating he was to the Jews, how loving he was? How he said, "I have no accusation against my nation?"

In spite of all that's been done to him, he preached lovingly. Second, he preached biblically. He expounded and testified the kingdom of God as it was recorded in the law of Moses and out of the prophets, verse 2. He preached Biblically. It wasn't his opinion it was biblical truth applied and fulfilled in the Messiah.

He also preached doctrinally. That is he taught the great doctrines of the kingdom in verse 31. The things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 23 indicates he taught concerning the kingdom of God. He preached lovingly, biblically and doctrinally. When did he preach? When? Number one - promptly. Give you four thoughts. He preached promptly. Verse 17, after three days he began. Second thing, tirelessly, verse 23, he preached from morning till evening, tirelessly. Thirdly, he preached incessantly for two whole years he preached, verse 30 and 31. And I like it at the end of verse 31, with all confidence he preached boldly.

When did he preach? Promptly, tirelessly, incessantly, and with great boldness. That's just kind of an addition.

To whom did he preach? Verse 17, to the Jews, verse 28, to the Gentiles, to anybody. And what did he preach? What was Paul's message? Verse 23, persuading them concerning Jesus. Verse 31, teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. He preached Jesus, that's who he preached.

People, what does that say to us? Where are we to preach? Wherever we are. How are we to preach? Lovingly, biblically, doctrinally.

When are we to preach? Promptly, tirelessly and incessantly and with boldness. To whom are we to preach? Jew or Gentile, anybody. And what are we to preach? Jesus Christ. And what are the results? The results are exciting. Verse 24, some believed, some believed. Verse 24, some argued and went away. Some believe and some do not. People, I hope this year we can write a chronicle at the end of the story of the Acts the Holy Spirit of this age and that it would be written down for all times that the ministry of the apostle Paul, which ended in the first century, was carried on by Grace Community Church in the twentieth. Wouldn't that be exciting? Let's pray.

Father, we thank You this morning for giving us the privilege and joy of sharing together in Your Word. Thank You for the anticipation that until Jesus comes we can continue to write the marvelous story of the growth of the church in the power of the Holy Spirit. We pray, Lord that You will give us a vision for evangelism, help us to catch the passion of this godly man who made every minute count. Give us the same desire to see people won to Christ. We thank You for what privilege is ours in the power of the Holy Spirit to carry on the work. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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