

Acts 28:11-31

Outward Church: Lessons Learned in Acts

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / March 13th, 2022

We started our series in Acts on January 5th, 2020. Acts is the first big book that we've covered in its entirety. Today is our 56th sermon in this series, Outward Church. How do you feel? Has anything changed in your life, in our church's life? The question, as we come to a close, is twofold. 1) What did we learn? 2) And what are we doing about it? The heartbeat of Acts is missions. Jesus outlined the book in our first chapter.

Acts 1:8 (NIV)

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

We saw Peter preach the gospel at Pentecost in Jerusalem, and then take the gospel to Judea and Samaria and to the Gentiles with Cornelius. Then Paul came and took it one step further, going on three missionary journeys throughout the ancient Roman world. Here at last Paul has brought the gospel to Rome. Jesus was right. The gospel has gone from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth.

What did we learn?

So what are our **lessons learned from Acts**? Here are some points that stick out to me.

1. God has an unstoppable Spirit-empowered plan.

Let's go back to the first half of Acts 1:8a, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you..." It wasn't that all the very best and brightest Christians got together after Jesus' ascension into heaven, and said, "How are we going to grow Christianity?" Instead, the Holy Spirit came and lead the church into mission, through the mess, through the trials and sufferings.

Look at Paul's homestretch on his way to Rome. Would any of us, if we planned to take the gospel to Rome, plan to get arrested and taken as a prisoner and shipwrecked? But God is working his own timing. In Acts 28:13, as the author of Acts, Luke, records their journey, he makes notes of a "south wind" that helped them reach Puteoli. That's like saying, "The wind was in their sails." They traveled 180 miles in just two days.¹ Why would God allow them to be shipwrecked then fill their sails with wind? I don't know but God does.

So the question for us is, "Are we in-sync with the Holy Spirit?" Are we seeking God's plan? Are we asking the Holy Spirit to lead? Are we praying? I have Google Drive synced with my Macbook and it kept disconnecting this week. I don't know why. But I found it incredibly frustrating, as I couldn't save files the way they were supposed to save. My computer didn't work right. When we as a church body don't seek the Holy Spirit through prayer, we don't work right. When we do pray, and we ask the Spirit to lead, we get in sync, and the Spirit empowers what God wants to happen.

I hope this series, as we finish, will be an encouragement to spent time in prayer, spend time seeking the Spirit, spend time listening. *God has an unstoppable Spirit-empowered plan.*

¹ Arnold, Clinton E.. Acts (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary) (p. 264). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.
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2. Acts calls us to reexamine what we believe to be true.

Paul arrives in Rome and is allowed to live by himself, but is chained to a Roman guard 24/7. This is one way God took the gospel to the Romans, through the palace guard (Philippians 1:13). Would any of us have planned it that way? Three-days after he arrives he calls the local Jewish leaders; and you can tell he's worried that they are going to shut him out before having the opportunity to speak. He's worried that the Jewish leaders in Rome sent word not to trust Paul, but they haven't yet. They have heard about the Jewish sect called "the Way," or Christianity, but they haven't heard of Paul (Acts 28:21-22).

So Paul gathers as many of the local Jews as he can and on one day he preaches about Jesus and the kingdom of God from morning till evening, trying to persuade them to believe in Jesus. That's one really long sermon; but it's what they needed to hear. How do they respond?

Acts 28:23-24 (NIV)

²³ They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. ²⁴ Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe.

Paul has just spent an entire day trying to help his Jewish brothers re-interpret texts that they have read and interpreted a certain way their entire lives. Paul has to help them both unlearn the old and learn about the Messiah in a new way. And he does it by going back to scripture. And this has been a re-occurring theme throughout Acts. Peter and Paul challenge the Jews to re-assess their relationship with Gentiles.

I want to talk about a word that's popular in our culture right now, and that's the word "deconstruction." To deconstruct means to take something apart in a thoughtful and intentional manner. When people say, "I'm deconstructing," it often means they're examining what they used to believe, and asking if it's true. The goal can be to not deconstruct forever, but to reconstruct what is genuine, real, and closer to the truth. Personally, I have deconstructed or am deconstructing various popular Christian beliefs, like the age of the earth, women in ministry, and political engagement. I've tried to build them back on a better understanding of God's word.

But another way of deconstruction is more like demolition; and I don't say this to be mean or unkind. What happens is that some sort of emotional, mental, or social event explodes in a person's life and it demolishes their understanding of Christianity. Often, it's not their fault. A pastoral mentor hurts them, a church community is unkind, or they disagree with the wider-evangelical community's actions. Something disenfranchises them, leading to loss of faith. I don't think Paul is doing that sort of deconstruction. And if you're going through that, please come talk to me and let's have a conversation. Rather, Paul is trying to reconstruct their Jewish faith from the Hebrew scriptures with a clear picture of how Jesus is the Messiah.

Maybe you need to go through a time of re-examining what you thought was true, and come to the scriptures, and see if what Jesus presents is true. And the great part is we're giving a church family to go through that process with us; others to help us wrestle with the hard questions and doubt. *So what have we learned so far?*
1. God has a Spirit-empowered plan. 2. Acts calls us to re-examine what we believe to be true.

3. The gospel confronts us with a choice.

Paul's Jewish audience listens to him, until he quotes the prophet Isaiah.

Acts 28:26-27 (NIV)

²⁶ "Go to this people and say,
"You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving."

²⁷ For this people's heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.

And then he says:

Acts 28:28 (NIV)

²⁸ "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!"

This is the exact same thing that almost got Paul killed when he testified in Jerusalem. The crowd listened to his testimony until Paul said God's plan of salvation is also for the Gentiles, the non-Jews. Paul is warning them to not harden their hearts; but because they do, God is going to use it to send the gospel outward to the Gentiles. I don't know why God works this way. There's both a really hard statement; you're going to close your ears and hearts; and an encouraging statement; the gospel is going to the Gentiles.

This is both supposed to encourage us to take the gospel to our neighbor, and to challenge us with that same choice. Will we believe, or will we harden our hearts? Will you believe, or will you harden your heart? Will you take the gospel out? *What have we learned from Acts? 1. God has an unstoppable Spirit-empowered plan. 2. Acts calls us to reexamine what we believe to be true. 3. The gospel confronts us with a choice.* So here's my final question.

What are we going to do about it?

What are we going to do about it? What are we as the church? As believers? As families going to do with Acts? I really want us to talk about that today, but I have two ideas and a question. The first is:

1. Take small, prayerful, steps.

How did Paul get from Jerusalem to Rome? One step at a time. It's not about the destination, but the journey. That's how we can approach our faith, and be obedient to the gospel message, too. One small step at a time, and over time, God can take us all the way from Jerusalem to Rome, if it's his will.

This applies whether you're a Christian, or not yet a Christian, whether you believe, or don't yet believe. If you don't yet believe, just take small, prayerful, steps. Read your Bible and ask God if he's there. Participate in our small group discussions. Try to go deep.

If you're a believer, take small, prayerful steps to know the Holy Spirit, to know Christ, and to share him with others. Maybe God will call you to be like Paul and be a missionary overseas, but maybe he'll call you to share Christ with your neighbor, the person you already know so well.

2. Let's be an outward church.

Our natural tendencies will be to turn inward, to focus on our church services and programs; but the drive of Acts is an outward-focused church. Are we an Outward Church? I think we can be if we follow Jesus out our front doors and into our Jerusalem, our Judea, our Samaria, to the ends of the earth. Jesus died and rose again so that the whole world might hear the good news about him. Let's take his message to the Ends of the Earth.

3. Where do you sense the Spirit's leading?

You are the next chapter of Acts. What is God calling us to do? Let's pray and discuss in our small groups.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA. You can listen to his other sermons at CornerstoneWestford.com.

Service & Sermon

You can watch the full service on Facebook or only the sermon on YouTube (coming soon).

Discussion Time

Instead of starting with an emotion update this week, we're going to spend more time on the text, and we invite you to share your emotions, and how you're doing, as part of the conversation.

Ice-Breaker – What's your name and which smartphone map app do you use, if any?

Scripture – Re-read Acts 28:25-27. Why do you think the author of Acts, Luke, ends by quoting this Isaiah text? How do you think his audience would have received it and how are we supposed to receive it?

Big Picture/Acts Recap – What's one thing you've learned from our series in Acts?

Onward – What's one small, prayerful, step you can take going forward?

Follow-Up

Dear Church,

Thanks for listening to Sunday's message. Here are a few follow-up ideas to help keep it fresh.

- Pastor Jonathan

Spiritual Exercises

Worship – When we took communion this last March, Andy led us using "[Brooke Ligertwood - Communion \(Lyric Video\)](#)." If you'd like to revisit that beautiful song, please click the link.

Content Curation

Acts Sermon – If you'd like a longer sermon on Sunday's closing passage in Acts, try: [A Handoff, Not a Finale - Acts 28:11-31 \(1.28.18\) - Pastor Jordan Rogers](#). I found his sermon to be thoughtful and a great study of the text.

Deconstruction Podcasts – While not everyone will find these helpful, if you're wrestling with questions of doubt, or know someone who is, these might be helpful. First, you could try "[Episode 454: Dangers, Doubts, & Deconstruction with A.J. Swoboda](#)" from the Holy Post podcast. As a Portland Pastor and professor, Swoboda has witnessed a lot of deconstructing, often for social reasons, and has a very winsome and encouraging way of addressing it. Second, if you're more of an intellectual, heady type, you could try "[How to Doubt Your Faith \(and How NOT to!\)](#)" by Dr. Sean McDowell. They clearly know their stuff, and are passionate about people finding Christ.

Sermon Slides