

Gospel Triumph: Mission Accomplished...And Advancing

Acts 28

I would never claim to be a very good project manager. It's not my natural gifting, but I do understand a few things about getting major projects accomplished. You have to know what the end goal is but then you have to understand the steps to take to get you moving toward the end goal. I tend to be more of an "end goal" type of person and I need more practical people to help me see the steps.

For example, if you want to learn conversational French because you are traveling to Paris next year, that's a great goal and a massive undertaking. You will need some signposts or markers along the way that indicate your progress. Maybe you want to know 100 verbs in 6 months and then you will need to set daily steps in place to help you reach those markers. As you move along you succeed and continue to move forward to the goal.

This is how I want you to think of the progress of the Mission in the book of Acts. We are finishing the book today in chapter 28 and the mission has been accomplished and is also still advancing. Markers have been reached and yet, the big picture goal is still in the future. Let me remind you of the outline of the book in Acts 1:8. Jerusalem (1-7) Judea & Samaria (8-12) and The Ends of the Earth (13-28).

We've seen the message move out from Jerusalem in circles into the Roman Empire and further. In chapter 27 we saw one of God's key witnesses, Paul, making his way toward Rome, the center of the ancient world. The gospel message of the kingdom and the King has advanced and is still advancing.

Luke, the author, concludes the book in an open-ended way that demands each reader evaluate his or her own engagement in the mission. So, as we wrap up this book today, here's what we will see in Acts 28. **2 Conclusions to Acts that Motivate Our Involvement in God's Mission.**

1. Mission Accomplished (vv. 1-16)

The story of Paul's journey from Caesarea toward Rome on the sea ended with the boat being torn apart and all 276 people on board landing on the island of Malta. Look at 28:1. Clearly God is still overseeing Paul's journey and also giving opportunities for His kingdom work to be done. Look what happens on Malta. Verses 2-3. The word translated "native people" emphasizes that these people were not Greek speaking but spoke their own tribal language. When Paul is bitten by this viper, they make a quick judgment call on what this means. Look at verse 4.

Paul had escaped the sea, and the wrath of the gods through the storm. But the gods wouldn't let him get away with what he had done. Justice would find him. There are several things that are fascinating about this. First of all, think about Paul's life trajectory. Was Paul actually a murderer? Absolutely. He had killed Christians in his former life. And yet things have changed so much. Remember this passage from Luke 10:17-20?

Look at verses 5-6. Their opinion of him flips so quickly. But who was Paul? He was certainly not a god, but he was a sinner saved by grace, protected by the one true God and called for His purposes and plan. He's a sinner who gets used by God to move His mission forward. Look at what happens next. Verses 7-9. This should remind you of the ministry of Jesus and yet, there's no mention here of Paul speaking the gospel to these people. What's going on here?

I think by this point in Acts we can assume that Paul preached the gospel here, and yet, Luke focuses on the miracles and signs performed here. Why? Keep in mind the purpose of miracles, healings, and signs in both the gospels and Acts. They show the reality of God's kingdom moving forward and of what the kingdom is like. It's ultimately a place of wholeness through the King. Even as Paul makes his journey to Rome the work of the kingdom continues. And in fact, in God's providence, this work apparently provides for Paul and the entire group of those shipwrecked to finish their journey to Rome. Look at verse 10.

The group wants to sail as soon as possible, and they head out as quickly as they can. Look at verse 11. Luke mentions the twin gods here for a bit of irony. These were the sons of Zeus and were supposed to protect sailors on the water. Anyone who had been with Paul or just read chapter 27 would know who the true

protector of people was. And the true protector brings them all the way to Rome. Look at verses 12-16. What do you notice here? There are already Christians on the way to Rome and in Rome who greet Paul and provide for him and the others. In fact, most people believe Paul wrote his letter to the Romans about 3 years before this while in Corinth. This is part of why we say the mission is accomplished. The gospel has moved from Jerusalem to the very center of power, the capitol, Rome.

The book of Acts has told the story of the mission of God to spread the Gospel. We've seen statements along the way of how this has happened. Listen to a few verses. (4:4; 5:42; 6:7; 12:24; 19:20) So, God's Word has multiplied, and the book ends with the Word continuing to multiply.

2. Mission Advancing (vv. 17-31)

What does Paul do as soon as he gets to Rome? Well, we saw in verse 16 that he's allowed to stay by himself, not in a Roman prison, but in a house or apartment with a single Roman guard. It's likely that Paul was chained to this guard. And what do you think they talked about? Well, listen to Philippians 1:12-13. As these different guards took their shifts watching Paul, they may have begun to wonder if Paul was the prisoner or if they were the prisoners! But the gospel again does its work. While this is happening Paul immediately pursues the Jews in Rome as has been his practice everywhere else he's been. Look at verses 17-20.

This is a short recap of what we've seen over the last several chapters. Notice in verse 20 he says the real reason for his imprisonment is the hope of Israel. Listen to Paul explain this in 26:6-8 before Agrippa. The hope of Israel is the reality of God's kingdom come and the anticipating of a future resurrection into that kingdom. That's the message Paul proclaimed. How do the Jews respond to this? Look at verses 21-22. They want to hear for themselves. Look at verse 23.

Paul spends an entire day with them. Notice that he expounds. He teaches and explains and notice there are two ways he does this. He testifies and tries to convince them about Jesus. In other words, he bears witness to the reality of God's kingdom, and he attempts to persuade them about the person and work of

Jesus as the hope of the OT. And how do they respond? Pretty standard for the book of Acts. Look at verse 24.

But there's one statement of Paul's that causes a stir and that Luke wants to highlight to bring this book to a close. Look at verse 25. So, Paul is going to quote from Isaiah the prophet and He understands the Spirit to have been speaking to the Jews of Isaiah's day through this passage. And no doubt Luke quotes this and Paul said it because they believe the Spirit was still speaking to the Jews of Paul's day through this passage. Look at verses 26-27.

This quote is taken from Isaiah 6:9-10. This is Isaiah's commissioning to be the Lord's prophet and take His Word to Israel. Listen to Isaiah 6:8. God told Isaiah to speak God's Word to the Jews but that they would not accept it. They would hear him and they would see, but the real problem was that they had dull and lifeless hearts that wouldn't accept the truth. Paul quotes this to say that this is still the same problem for Israel, even during his day. Paul is God's prophet, proclaiming the truth of the OT and the people hear it but don't accept it. They see the miracles but don't believe what Paul has to say about Jesus.

We've seen this happen throughout Acts and what has been the result? Listen to what happened in Ephesus. Acts 19:8-10. It's exactly what the OT anticipated and what Paul now explains in verse 28. The book of Acts has shown how the Gospel has moved out from Jerusalem to the Gentiles. And notice that Paul now looks to the future and say that the Gentiles will listen.

Does this mean that no more Jews will be saved? That we should be done with the Jews? Of course not. Notice how the book ends. Verse 30. Paul awaited his trial before Caesar for two years, living under house arrest, and he welcomed anyone who wanted to speak with him. This includes both Jews and Gentiles. Paul was not done with the Jews, just like Isaiah wasn't done with the Jews. In fact, if you read God's commission to Isaiah in Isaiah 6, notice what God says in Isaiah 6:11-13. It's a subtle hint that a holy seed will come out of the rejection of the majority. In other words, God has a remnant. This was still very true in Paul's day.

But here's the beauty of how Acts ends. Paul welcomed all, Jew or Gentile, and all would receive the promises of God and enter the kingdom of God in the same way. Look at verse 31.

These are the two dominant messages of Acts and the core of the gospel. God's kingdom, promised in the OT, has come in the person and work of Jesus Christ and the only way to enter that kingdom is through the forgiveness of sins that is offered because of Him. Jew or Gentile. Slave or free. Man or woman. All enter into the kingdom by one door.

We don't find out what happens to Paul here. Does he stand before Caesar? Is he put to death immediately after two years? Does he go free and take the gospel further? Luke doesn't address those questions because the book is meant to end with an open feel. This work continues to this day.

Now listen, we began our study in Acts in September of 2024. I looked back at my notes from that introductory sermon and my concern then was for us, as a church, to maintain a focus on our mission in the world. We've talked a lot the past year about looking outward with the gospel because Acts compels us to advance the message out into the world.

The church is always trying to maintain a carefully balanced posture. We have two responsibilities. We must, as we've seen in Acts, look outward into the world with the gospel. And, at the same exact time, we must grow disciples deeper in the truth and cultivate a community here. Think of this like a golfer getting ready to hit a shot. If you've ever watched golf, the golfer will look up toward the hole and where he needs to hit the ball, but he also has to maintain an eye on the ball and think about his own swing and body movement. So, you will see a golfer preparing to swing looking up and down, up and down. I think that's the balancing act we are responsible for as a church. We look out and we look in. We proclaim the gospel out and we clarify the gospel in. We baptize disciples and we teach them all things.

Some churches only ever look in and some only ever look out. The quickest way to ill health as a church and ultimate death as a church is to ignore one of these two

looks. We need a robust grasp of doctrine and a relentless pursuit of unbelievers with the truth. So, here's my encouragement to you individually and our commitment as elders and as a church. Study hard. Learn the Bible. Engage with believers in the church body and encourage one another. And, welcome new people. Cultivate relationships with unbelievers. Invite them into your home. Share the gospel. It's the only way to be faithful to the mission. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 11/23/25

- Would you consider yourself more of a “big picture” person or a details person when it comes to projects?
- How is the mission of God both accomplished and advancing in Acts?
- Describe the process that has gotten Paul to the island of Malta at the beginning of chapter 28.
- How does the incident with the viper on Malta contribute to our understanding of the Apostle Paul?
- Why does this story focus on the miracles performed on Malta and not on the preaching of the gospel?
- What’s the irony behind Luke’s mention of the twin gods on the front of the ship in Acts 28:11?
- What two themes dominate Paul’s explanation before the Jews?
- Why does Paul quote Isaiah 6:9-10? What point is he making?
- Does Paul’s use of this quote from Isaiah indicate that God is done with the Jews?

- Why don't we find out what happens to Paul at the end of Acts?
- Pastor Nathan mentioned the church's responsibility to look inward and outward at the same time. Explain what this means. Which do we do a better job of? How can we help to maintain this balance? Which comes more naturally to you? How can you grow toward a better balance in these areas?