

A Study of the Acts of the Apostles
Week Thirty-Two
Acts 26:16-27:12

Day One

16 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. 17 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' 19 "So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.

v. 16 – Paul had fallen down but God told him to stand up and pay attention. That is a good posture for you and I to take—readiness! The Lord appointed Saul to be a servant first and then a witness of what he had seen and would see. Paul had to be appointed a servant. He would become the servant of his revelation. I first saw the purpose message 20 years ago and it has changed my life. That message doesn't serve me; I serve it. I have had to change and adjust my life to be a faithful steward of that message. **What message do you serve?**

v. 17 – This statement wasn't a positive one. If God promised to rescue Saul, then that meant things would be bad enough at times that he would need rescued! In an indirect way, God was promising Saul hard times. And what's more, God didn't apologize for what Saul would eventually experience. God is God and can choose your lot with no regrets on His part and no questions of "why?" on your part.

v. 18 – God sent Saul to the Gentiles (not to the Jews it would seem) to do five things: 1) open their eyes; 2) turn them from darkness to light; 3) turn them from the power of Satan to God; 4) bring forgiveness of sins; 5) provide them a place for those who are sanctified by faith. Notice that Saul's mission was clear and concise. And he went forth in the power of that clarity.

The question then remains: is this clarity available to every believer or just to special ones like Saul, who was assigned a special and noteworthy job? It is my opinion that this clarity is available to anyone who wants it and who is willing to pay a price to get it. What is that price, you ask? It is diligent seeking. Note the promise in Proverbs:

And if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 2:3-6).

Are you seeking wisdom and your purpose like you would hidden treasure? If not, then you may not obtain either!

v. 19 – Notice what Saul called this encounter: a heavenly vision. That is what your purpose is: a vision from heaven, brighter than the noontday sun. What is the heavenly vision for your life? Do you know? What are you doing with that vision? Has it changed your life? The lives of those around you?

Day Two

20 First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. 21 That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. 22 But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— 23 that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles."

v. 20 – What a wonderful summary of the Christian life: repent from sin, turn to God and prove that one has repented by producing good deeds. Good deeds cannot produce salvation, but good deeds prove that saving grace is working in the believer's life. As someone once asked, "If you were tried for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to find you 'guilty?'" Repentance is also a way of life for the believer, as we are constantly turning from any futile ways of life and thinking and turning to God. Don't ever think you "outgrow" your need to repent.

v. 21 – Paul neatly summarized the charges against him, putting them into just a short sentence. The Jews seized him and tried to kill him because he was preaching repentance and salvation. I like Paul's efficiency of words. But once again I wonder: how did Luke get hold of this speech? Was he there? Did someone take shorthand and record the speech, and then gave it to Luke? Luke was a good investigative writer, using an orderly style and excellent Greek. Luke shared his writing style at the beginning of his gospel and you can be sure it carried over to his work in Acts:

Therefore, since I myself have *carefully investigated* everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an *orderly account* for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may *know the certainty of the things* you have been taught (Luke 1:3-4).

Luke had carefully investigated the truth and put it in writing. Are you committed to the truth? Or have exaggeration or sloppy details crept into your accounts and work? God never promotes potential; He promotes excellence and those who have paid a price to do all things well, as was true in Jesus' life:

People were overwhelmed with amazement. "He has done everything well," they said. "He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak" (Mark 7:37).

vs. 22&23 – Now lest the listeners put their focus on Paul, he turned and ended his presentation with a tribute to the Lord. First, he acknowledged that God had helped him survive to that particular day when he spoke to Agrippa. God had protected him from his

enemies. Then he again gave a succinct summary of his gospel message: that Jesus would suffer and when raised, preach the good news to the Jews and Gentiles. Notice even though Paul was preaching, he acknowledged that it was really Jesus preaching through him to his listeners, both small and great.

I like the phrase “proclaim light.” Paul and all the Lord’s preachers and teachers were proclaiming light, which meant that their listeners were in darkness. And John explained to us some of the dynamics between this light and darkness:

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world (John 1:3-9).

It should never surprise us that darkness will recoil from the light, but it should also give us confidence that darkness can never overwhelm or eradicate the light. Light is superior to darkness and we have the light. **So be bold and go where it is darkest, for that is where the light is needed most. Where is the darkness that you can address and drown in the brightness of Jesus? Where is there darkness that you fear? What can you do to address that fear? Are you willing to be God’s torch in dark caves of men’s minds and hearts?**

Day Three

24 At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane." 25 "I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. 26 The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."

v. 24 – Festus was so convicted by the message that he had to do something to discredit it in his own mind and the minds of the listeners. So he suggested that Paul was crazy and a religious lunatic. At some point, Paul must have impressed Festus as a learned man. But Festus could not see how a man this intelligent could espouse the resurrection doctrine and be in his right mind. Once again I am impressed at the similarity between Paul’s and Jesus’ journey, for at one point people thought Jesus was crazy, too:

When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind" (Mark 3:21).

I remember at one point that our families wanted nothing to do with us because of our commitment to Jesus. When we left our denomination, they said we were crazy—and meant it! But one day, God comforted me with the verse from Mark and I have never

looked back. If they thought Jesus was crazy, then someone will think that I am crazy to follow Him. **Who thinks you are crazy? Anyone? Are you concerned that they would think that? Are you crazy for Jesus? I'm not talking about being silly, but following Jesus no matter what.**

v. 25 – Paul did not take Festus' comment personally. He wasn't offended, because it wasn't about him; it was about Jesus and the eternal fate of the listeners. **It isn't about you and me, is it? It's always about Him. If you're dead in Him, then insults can't hurt or affect you, can they?** Paul simply stated that what he was talking about wasn't crazy, but sane and rational. And I would have to agree. Why would it be so incredible that God who created life, can also restore it through resurrection?

v. 26 – Paul shifted the focus from him and Festus back to Agrippa, for whom the meeting was convened. Paul tried to move Agrippa to a point of decision, or at least a point where he would acknowledge that Paul was speaking something reasonable according to the Jewish covenant. Paul read his audience well and knew that Agrippa and Bernice were acquainted with what he said—thus Paul so forthrightly.

Do you know your audience when you speak or witness? Are you able to adjust your message to the level of the listener? That is a critical factor in successful teaching and witnessing.

v. 27 – Paul continued to try and draw out Agrippa to make a decision for Jesus, tying his message to the Old Testament prophets. The Agrippas had many witnesses come to them—the Magi, John the Baptist, Jesus and now Paul. God chose to send the very best to them in His mercy and grace. Their ultimate rejection of the gospel was not because they had not heard it or understood it. **To whom does God want to send you as a witness? Any one group or family? We just heard a missionary to Indonesia speak in our church. Does God want to send you to a people group? Will you go?**

Day Four

28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" 29 Paul replied, "Short time or long — I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains." 30 The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. 31 They left the room, and while talking with one another, they said, "This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment." 32 Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

v. 28 – I would imagine that everyone was feeling the pressure of Paul's convincing and passionate presentation. The Holy Spirit was working in their hearts and Agrippa knew that the goal of Paul's work was to convert him. Since Agrippa did believe the prophets, the natural consequence of that was to believe Paul. But of course, Agrippa had much to lose by such a profession and to the best of our knowledge, never made such a step of faith in Christ.

v. 29 – This was almost the mission statement for Paul’s life. He wanted everyone to become a believer without the chains that he was then wearing. It is ironic that Paul was wearing the chains, yet he was free, and Agrippa was wearing royal robes but was bound. Paul was in chains for the same purpose that Joseph was in chains: to do the will of God and be where God wanted him to be.

He called down famine on the land and destroyed all their supplies of food; and he sent a man before them — Joseph, sold as a slave. They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the LORD proved him true. The king sent and released him, the ruler of peoples set him free. He made him master of his household, ruler over all he possessed, to instruct his princes as he pleased and teach his elders wisdom (Psalm 105:16-22).

Where does it seem like you are bound but you really free to be bound to the work that God has for you? Does that make sense? For instance, I am bound to Africa. I can’t get away from the invitations and work that is there for me, even though at times I wish I had more to do closer to home. But God is in that and I am free—free to go and do God’s will for me there.

vs. 30-32 – Agrippa ended the session before he heard any more evidence that he should become a disciple. In their discussions with one another, the officials determined that Paul was innocent and could have been set free, had he not appealed to Caesar. If Festus agreed with that judgment, then why did he want to hold Paul over for trial in Jerusalem? Paul knew that he would have been subject to the political maneuverings of the local officials who would want to stay in good graces with his Jewish opponents and keep the peace. So he appealed to Caesar. As stated earlier, however, this appeal provided Paul’s free passage to Rome where Caesar would hear the same message that Agrippa and his entourage had just heard.

It is interesting that Paul would go to Rome, under royal escort and protection, to fulfill his purpose of preaching to the Gentiles and their kings. God will always provide a way for you to fulfill your purpose and it is usually without you trying to make it happen.

What is that you do that when you do it you feel God’s help?

Day Five

27:1 When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. 2 We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us. 3 The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs. 4 From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us.

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v. 1 – Luke must have been by Paul’s side during this entire ordeal, including Paul’s presentation to Agrippa. That is how he was able to record Paul’s sermon in his account. So Luke’s role and place were determined by Paul’s role and place, since God assigned Luke to support and serve Paul. **Whom do you serve?** It is not unusual for God to join people together in a life of service and care:

He who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who looks after his master will be honored (Proverbs 27:18).

An officer of the king of Israel answered, "Elisha son of Shaphat is here. He used to pour water on the hands of Elijah (2 Kings 3:11).

In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there (Mark 15:41).

v. 2 – Aristarchus was another servant and co-worker with Paul. He is mentioned in Acts 19:29 as having been in Ephesus with Paul and is also mentioned in Acts 20:4 and Philemon 24. But then he is mentioned another epistle:

My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (Colossians 4:10).

Since Aristarchus wasn’t a prisoner here in Acts 27, he must have become one with Paul at a later date. So Aristarchus’ destiny was tied to Paul’s and part of that destiny included some time in jail. When God calls you to serve Him and in serving Him to serve a brother or sister, that service may become inconvenient or even harmful. But that is none of your concern. You must continue to do what it is that God wants you to do.

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity (Proverbs 17:17).

Is there any part of your life that is made painful by the service that God has assigned you? Don’t be discouraged by that, but bear it with good cheer and grace.

v. 3 – Even though Paul was thought to be innocent, he would still have been bound by a chain to a Roman soldier. Yet Julius gave him some leeway to be able to visit the believers in Sidon. So Paul was able to make apostolic visits at Rome’s expense on his way to Rome! God is a good God and provides in many different ways for us, especially to do His will. And tradition has it that anyone who was chained to Paul or assigned to guard him became a Christian! God used Paul’s chains to set people free! Our God is an awesome God! **Where are your “chains” serving to be bless other people? To that extent, can you rejoice in your “bondage” for the sake of others? I am chained to Africa and those chains have been a blessing to many and to me. Can you see the same dynamic in your own life?**

v. 4 – Luke must have kept a good journal of the trip, not relying on his memory. How are you in keeping a journal? Do you write things down that impress you, things that

God shows you, things that are important to you? Someone once said that the problem with taking mental notes is that the ink fades so quickly. I urge you to do some kind of writing to process and see what you are thinking and what God is doing in your life.

Day Six

5 When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. 6 There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. 7 We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone. 8 We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.

vs. 5-8 – It appears that the prisoner and his entourage were on public shipping. I would have thought they would have been on a military ship, but there may not have been such a thing. Travel certainly was an important part of Paul’s life and strategy:

Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? (2 Corinthians 11:25-29).

And his travel was not without danger or inconvenience, I’m sure. I have logged 3 million miles since 1989 and I’ve have my share of travel experiences. It is a well-known fact that I love to travel, but I believe that God gave me that love so I could do what He wants me to do. After all, remember what Jesus told His disciples:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:18-20).

I preach a message for missions conferences and it’s entitled, “What Part of ‘Go’ Don’t You Understand?” I also teach a missions class and make the statement in the class, “When God wants to speak to you, He very often takes you on a trip.” When you travel, of necessity you must be more aware of your surroundings. That enables you to be more aware of the Lord, what He saying and doing in your life. **So, where will you go? I’m not saying you have to travel as much as I do. But you should have a passport and every once in a while go somewhere outside your culturally comfort zone to do something for God. Where will that be? There are a myriad of short-term missions opportunities today, no matter what country you live in. So first set your**

mind on where you think God wants you to go, and then begin to make plans of how you can get there. And this isn't just if you live in the United States. No matter where you live, the Great Commission in Matthew 28 applies to you. So get busy and get going.

Day Seven

9 Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Fast. So Paul warned them, 10 "Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also." 11 But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. 12 Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest.

vs. 9&10 – Paul now “saw” that the voyage was headed for disaster. Old Testament prophets were often referred to as “seers” because they could see things from God’s perspectives. They weren’t future-tellers only, but often they could predict certain events and warn the people accordingly. It is interesting to me that Paul warned them of great loss to ship and cargo, which happened, and great loss of life, which did not happen. Did this make Paul a false prophet? Not at all, as we will see later. I never expect a person with a prophetic gift to be correct 100% of the time because of what Paul wrote to the Corinthian church:

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears (1 Corinthians 13:8-11).

When someone utters a prophecy, it should be judged for accuracy because no one is in tune with God that much to see things “clearly.”

vs. 11&12 – The centurion of course listened to the experts—the seaman and the owner. Of course the owner wanted to deliver his goods so he could get paid. The pilot wanted to find a more suitable port. So the crew held discussions and a majority wanted to go on. This indicates that neither the experts nor the majority are always correct. They “hoped” to sail on and find a better harbor where they could spend the winter. How often I have done things that I “hoped” would turn out, but they did not. The crew hoped to get to Phoenix, but they did not and the results were disastrous and almost fatal. It’s interesting that God did speak in that situation and he spoke through the “non-expert” Paul. Often God will use the one who knows the least but is open to Him the most.

There are times when I think I know better and I don’t need to consult God. I can handle this myself. It is often at those times when I am most vulnerable to failure. Are you taking care of something “yourself” at this point in your life? Are you relying on your

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experience more than on God? If so, be careful. You may be heading for the same fate as this ship headed to Rome with Paul, a story we will continue in next week's study.