

# ACTS | Carry the Torch | Story 41

Acts 28:23-31

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## Introduction

**Today**, we conclude our study through the book of Acts that began in September. The final chapters of the book of Acts are about Paul and about his sufferings—he was falsely arrested, falsely accused, almost assassinated, and imprisoned. He appealed to Rome in order to get a fair trial, and on the way to Rome he was shipwrecked. When Paul finally arrived in Rome, he was put in a rented house with one guard.

*That's where our passage picks up today...*

### Acts 28:23-31

<sup>23</sup> When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to **the kingdom of God** and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. <sup>24</sup> And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. <sup>25</sup> And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement:

“The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: <sup>26</sup> “Go to this people, and say, “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” <sup>27</sup> For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’ <sup>28</sup> Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”

- As we’ve seen in all of Paul’s speeches, he does not mince words. He’s quoting from the prophet Isaiah, and Paul is telling them, *“This scripture about the Jews plugging their ears, and not being able to see or perceive the truth... this stubbornness of mind and hardness of heart—this is written about you! And the Gentiles—the message is for them because they’ll actually listen!”*
  - They left Paul, vehemently arguing with one another about what he quoted.

<sup>30</sup> He lived there **two whole years** at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, <sup>31</sup> proclaiming **the kingdom of God** and teaching about the **Lord Jesus Christ** with all boldness and without hindrance.

*The whole book of Acts is one epic encounter after another as the Holy Spirit moves upon and through the early believers—the gospel is spreading, churches are being planted and established around the first century world. There are executions and conversions, trials, persecution, constant near-death encounters—and then it all builds to this gigantic let down at the end of the book...*

The book of Acts ends by simply saying.. *“Paul was confined to this house in Rome, where he taught... and led some Bible studies... The end.”* What? That’s it!?

You would think that there would be some conclusion regarding what happened to him!

- Does Paul get a fair trial?
- Is he set free? Is he executed?
- Who knows? It just abruptly ends...

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## Background / two-year imprisonment

In Rome, when someone was being held because of charges brought against them, there was a **two-year statutory period** where all of that individual's accusers and the prosecution would prepare and bring all substantiating evidence to make their case before a Roman court. But the fact that the text says that Paul was held for the entire two-year period tells you that Paul's accusers never showed up, or that the accusations were never substantiated.

- We know this *from tradition, not from Scripture*, that Paul was released; and many years later was imprisoned again, tried, and executed.

*I want to weave a narrative together for you from some of Paul's final writings—and what we see unfolding is the end of the book of Acts.*

*Often when we find ourselves in difficult or unexpected trials or troubling circumstances—we begin to question ourselves, question God—wrestling, analyzing, and rehearsing where we might have gone wrong, or why God is allowing what he is allowing.*

*Here Paul is still imprisoned—years of being in chains. It would be easy for Paul to play the victim, to feel sorry for himself, to fall into self-pity or self-doubt—wondering where he went wrong, did he veer off course, did he misunderstand God's will?*

*But Paul doesn't doubt God. He doesn't question himself, his calling, his mission—he doesn't fall into self-pity, he doesn't play the victim, he doesn't cry of injustice. **What does he do?***

Scripture tells us that **he preached the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance!**

- During this two-year period:
- Paul wrote Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians
- 4 of the 13 New Testament letters were written during this time.
- **Paul didn't waste a moment!**

*This is why, when He's writing to the Ephesian believers from his imprisonment, he tells them plainly...*

### **Ephesians 5:15-17**

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, <sup>16</sup> **making the best use of the time**, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

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## Perspective and the Dominican Republic

One of the things the Lord reminded me of during our time in the Dominican Republic is that in Western Culture, we strive so hard for our own comfort and convenience. We get tunnel vision around our little piece of the planet, and completely lose sight of what in the world we're even doing here! It was so helpful to get outside of the bubble of Williamson County for a few days last week, spent at Josiah's House.

**Jose Carlos:** Jose Carlos is 9 years old and came to us from the street. He has many scars from abuse, wouldn't let us even hug him, was very combative, and didn't trust anyone. He was hungry, dirty, had major skin infections, and his teeth were rotten. He thought that he had been brought to Josiah's House as punishment for bad behavior. We consistently loved him, cared for his physical needs, and gained his trust. Now he runs to give hugs, he is settling in his family environment, and is now in school.

**Rebecca Andrea, Carmen, Luisa:** This is Rebecca 10, Andrea 7, and Carmen 2. These precious little girls had been alone for days with no food. Their Mom is a prostitute, she left Rebecca to care for her siblings, and would receive a beating if she asked neighbors for help. They were tired, hungry, covered in lice, and scared. There were supposed to be four girls, but the mother took one with her, Luisa. Luisa was three. Rebecca shared with us, weeping, that Luisa was very tiny, sick, and she was afraid she was going to die. They prayed and prayed that the Lord would bring Luisa to Josiah's House as well. Within two weeks God made a way for Luisa to join her sisters. She was tiny, emaciated, wearing 12-months size clothing. Now Luisa is getting healthier every day and gaining weight. She has a sparkle in her eyes and just learned to ride a tricycle. All the sisters are together, they're healthy, they're safe... they're loved... and learning about Jesus.

**Teo:** Teo is deaf and mute and on the autism spectrum. He was found wandering in a sugar cane field near a little village. The other children of the village would chase him and beat him. He was sleeping under a porch, and he had no way to survive except for the kindness of a few people in the village who gave him food. Teo would find trash in the village and build kites out of them. Now at Josiah's House he has a safe place to live and is in a special needs school. He still builds kites. Teo is around 20 years old now. We hope to move him to Hope Continues (18+ age house) soon with a family to take care of him.

*When you hear these stories, see the trauma, and then witness the transformation for these children... who have incredible opportunities that would've never come their way otherwise. Does it not make things that we thought were important moments ago seem so petty and small?*

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## **Life poured out as a drink offering**

*Some of the last words we have from Paul were written to his young protégé Timothy.*

### **2 Timothy 4:6-8**

For I am already being **poured out as a drink offering**, and the time of my departure has come. <sup>7</sup> I have **fought the good fight**, I have **finished the race**, I have **kept the faith**. <sup>8</sup> Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

***How many of us view our lives as an offering being poured out in service of others for the glory of God?***

One of the temptations for the western church is that we find ourselves inoculated from the world as separatists, lulled into a hypnotic slumber of comfort, complacency, self-gratification, and consumerism.

***All the while there is a God-given mission that is being abdicated.***

We're more concerned with our own careers, comfort, and convenience than we are with the commands and commission of Christ! We think that the more successful you are, the more comfortable you can become.

**When you reach the end of your life...** how do you want to say you've used your time? *"Well, I'm not sure how much good I did, but I sure was comfortable. Well, I never really took much risk.... But at least nothing bad happened to me."*

**Or** do you want to look back on your life and say like Paul, *"No, I fought the good fight! I laid it all on the line! I took risks, I dreamed big, I stepped out, I loved people well, I trusted God even when I was scared out of my mind, my life was an offering poured out as a drink offering to God, and I have finished my leg of the race..."*

*"Quit living as if the purpose of life is to arrive safely at death."<sup>1</sup>  
~ Mark Batterson*

*Yet that's how most of us live! It's not a call to live impulsively or foolishly, but it is an invitation to actually LIVE! To put down the phone, to stop the endless scrolling and trolling, and actually ask God to speak to you about the purpose for which He made you and placed you on this earth and—take action!*

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## What if I've missed my opportunity?

***What if I've blown it, or I've wasted so much time—what if I've missed my opportunity?***

- 1. God wastes nothing that is surrendered to Him.**
- 2. Everything God has allowed in your past is preparation for your future.**

*No matter what your journey has been up until this moment,  
God wants to redeem your past,  
refocus your present,  
repurpose your future.*

**Don't waste the time you've been given.**

**Use it, not as unwise, but as wise—understanding the will of the Lord.**

**What do you think the point of all of Luke's writings in the book of Acts are?**

### **Acts 28:30-31**

He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, <sup>31</sup>proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

***The gospel was still being preached without obstacle or hindrance.***

Luke is telling us 2,000 years later...

*"Look at everything the world threw at us. Look at the world. Look at the flesh. Look at the Devil. Look at all the opposition. They killed us, they imprisoned us, they threatened us, they beat us, they insulted us, they did everything they possibly could to silence us, but the gospel cannot be stopped." You might kill the preacher, but you'll never kill the gospel. You might imprison the missionary, but you'll never restrain the gospel."*

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Batterson. *All In* (Zondervan, Sep 24, 2013)

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## Christianity has broken through all the cultural barriers

Every other religion on the face of the earth has 80 to 90 percent of its adherents in one or two continents. Every other religion is relegated to where it originated and maybe a neighboring continent. Not Christianity.

Estimated Distribution of Christian Population by Country and Territory in 2010  
Only the top countries with more than a million Christians in 2010 are shown.



*“A comprehensive demographic study of more than 200 countries finds that there are 2.18 billion Christians of all ages around the world, representing nearly a third of the estimated global population of 6.9 billion. Christians are also geographically widespread – so far-flung, in fact, that no single continent or region can indisputably claim to be the center of global Christianity.”<sup>2</sup>*

*~ Pew Research Center, Global Christianity*

Something like 20 percent of Christians are in Africa. There are about 20 percent who are in South America. Something like 20 percent are in Asia. There are 20 percent in Europe. **Christianity is the only universal religion, the only religion that has broken through all the cultural barriers.**

***Why? Because the gospel can't be stopped. That's the message of the book of Acts.***

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## Conclusion

***What does that mean for us as carriers of that message?***

*The Acts of the Apostles, of the church, of the Holy Spirit didn't end with Paul teaching during his imprisonment in Rome.*

***You know what the book of Acts tells us about the rest of the time that we've been given?***

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<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center, “Global Christianity—A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population,” December 19, 2011, <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>.

### ***You know what the central message of this whole book is?***

- **The book of Acts tells us** that we are not to be consumers, customers, critics, or club members—but **co-laborers in the mission of God**
- **The book of Acts tells us** that we not to be people of timidity and scarcity, but of **radical faith** and **outrageous generosity**.
- **The book of Acts tells us** that **every member of the body of Christ is a missionary** to someone, somewhere.
- **The book of Acts tells us** that the question should never be, “**If we’re sent,**” but, “**To whom we are sent?**”
- **The book of Acts tells us** that the church is **not an audience to be entertained** but an **army to be empowered!**
- **The book of Acts tells us** that all of our church programs without the presence of God is absolute vanity!
  - And to do what we’ve always done, and expect a different result, is insanity!
  - A friend sent me a quote this week as a reminder... *“The church is a mission station not a museum, and we see past events, both success and failure as stepping stones, not stop signs!”*
- **The book of Acts tells us** that the church is not limited to a building, a property, or any given location... it tells us that **Not even the nations are ‘out of bounds.’**
- **The book of Acts tells us** that we are to be FAR more concerned with how many we **send out** than how many we **draw in**.
  - *We don’t have empty seats, we have reserved seats,* and I can’t wait to meet who God is bringing our way. This building is meant to be filled, and it will be, but a filled building will not be the measure of our effectiveness or success.
  - **The success of the church is not measured by seating capacity but sending capacity.**
  - The church is not an echo chamber, but a training ground for disciple-makers.
- **The book of Acts tells us** that the same power that lived in those early radicals is the same power that lives in us. If we just read about the book of Acts, and don’t live the book of Acts, **we’ve missed the point entirely.**

### **The book of Acts is**

- An invitation to a life on mission
- A life of purpose
- A life of risk
- A life of trials
- And struggle, and pain, and victory, and joy and sorrow
- All for the expansion of God’s Kingdom on the earth and the glory of His name



*If your dreams for what God could do in and through you don't terrify you, you're not dreaming big enough.*

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."<sup>3</sup>  
~ Theodore Roosevelt

**Don't waste your life in the pursuit of lesser things.**

**Live on mission.**

**Carry the gospel.**

**Exemplify Jesus.**

**Make disciple-makers.**

**And don't ever quit!!!**

*One day, you'll look back at a life well spent, and like Paul, having fought the good fight, finished the race, you'll receive a crown of righteousness as the Lord welcomes you home saying, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."*

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## Discussion Questions

1. When Paul preached the gospel, some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. What does this tell us about our telling others about Jesus, even if some will not believe?
2. How did Paul spend his two years of house arrest?  
What do you think you would do if you were imprisoned for the gospel for two years?
3. What have you experienced in your life that has made "things we thought were important" now seem petty and small?
4. Do you view/live your life as an offering to be poured out in the service of others for the glory of God? Why or why not?
5. What are the central messages of the book of Acts?
6. Discuss: *"If your dreams for what God could do in and through you don't terrify you, you're not dreaming big enough."*

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<sup>3</sup> Theodore Roosevelt. *Citizenship in a Republic*. (Good Press, Dec 8, 2020)

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