

Acts 28 ▪ A Preserved and Persevering Life ▪ Ryan Perz ▪ December 6, 2020

A look at some final priorities: prayer, fellowship, and witness, that encourages believers to finish strong in the Lord Jesus

Intro: We all share one thing in common today— all our lives have been preserved to this very moment. We all have a pulse right now.

That's the background to Acts 28—God preserved Paul's life in multiple circumstances through *remarkable deliverance*.

- Shipwreck—landing on the island of Malta (60 mi. south of Sicily)
- The viper bite

There is an OT story about God preserving life. In 2 Kings 20, Hezekiah is told he will die, but after prayer God preserved his life 15 more years. Yet King Hezekiah is not an example of living with any sense of priority with those years. The prophet Isaiah foretells of the Babylonian invasion that will be in the future.

2 Kings 20:19 ESV

Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good.” For he thought, “Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?”

As we finish the book of Acts, one thing is clear. God does not preserve a Christian's life for the mere sake of peace and security. Thus we need to be sure we receive the gift of life intentionally, and with purpose.

- What stands out in this chapter is Paul's interaction with 3 groups: pagans, other believers, and Jews. We learn lesson from all three.

1. Persevere in prayer (8)

- In the book of Acts, Jesus's followers are portrayed as devoted to prayer.

Acts 1:14 ESV

All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

- That word “devoted” means persevere, continue in, be constant.

- Jesus said a mark of discipleship is devoted prayer.

Luke 18:1 ESV

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.

Acts 2:21 describes the first sign of salvation is “calling on the name of the Lord”.

- That’s exactly what we find Paul doing at his conversion; Ananias is told to find Paul.

Acts 9:11 ESV

And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas, look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying.

Apply: If you want to know where your relationship with God is, prayer is a starting point. Do you pray? Not just when the preacher leads in a prayer, or at meals.

In your quiet hours, do you pray? Have you called on the name of the Lord out of faith? Do you call him Abba/ Father?

- So it’s fitting that Acts finishes with a final episode of praying (v8); in this sense, Acts in bookended with prayer.
- In v8 Paul has an opportunity to pray over a sick man.

Publius’s father probably had “Malta Fever”—a sickness traced to bad goat’s milk. A vaccine was developed in 1887, but until then a person could have an ongoing fever for months.

- This little pocket is under the umbrella “ends of the earth”.
- As Paul sits in the far corners of the earth, we see *God continues to listen to the prayers of his people.*

When I first started in ministry an older man told me he prayed for me daily. He was sincere; every time he saw me he reminded me of that. I did his funeral in 2016. It hit me that he no longer would be praying for me.

- › The SC state motto: *While I Breathe, I Hope.* The disciple’s life motto: *While we breathe, we pray.*

As God preserves our life, will we use it to pray—especially prayer to bless others. Prayer aimed at others’ healing and restoration, and wholeness.

2.Persevere in fellowship (14-15)

- As Paul arrives in Italy, a group of small-town believers come to meet him (14). Some likely would have traveled 30-40 miles by foot to see him.
- Paul wrote Romans before this and longed to see them.

Romans 15:32 ESV

so that by God's will I come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.

- V15 is what I want us to take note of: these believers were a reason to thank God and provided fresh courage.

2020 has been the most challenging year for the church for the main reason of unity. So many polar-opposite opinions and perspectives.

› *We need to persevere in fellowship— we need to see one another as family and part of the mission.*

- Let's look again at Paul's response. (15b)

1. He is thankful for the fellowship
2. He is encouraged with it

Christian friends, is that where your heart is at today? Thankful for fellowship, and seek encouragement from fellowship?

If our hearts are more critical at others than thankful, we've started to lose our way.

If we are better at judging than encouraging, we've also lost the great gift of fellowship.

3. Persevere in witness (23-31)

- Witness is a major thread that runs throughout Acts.

Once I saw a traffic accident at an intersection where a teenage boy on a bicycle was hit by a car. The officer taking the report told me I may be subpoenaed to court. Since I was a witness, I just needed to tell the truth about what I saw.

That's what witness is: telling the truth about what we see.

- There are three truths we see about God:

a.) Sovereign rule (v23)

- Witness to God's kingdom. It's a phrase that could take some time to unpack.

KOG (Kingdom of God) = shorthand way of saying God rules over sin, death, and everything that hinders his saving purpose. (David Peterson)

Luke 17:20–21 ESV

Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, he answered them, “The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”

- The point is that the Kingdom of God is not some distant future reality. It’s what takes place here and now when Christ takes up residence in our heart.

› **Salvation is Jesus’s sovereign rule invading our life. We get dethroned; he gets exalted.**

b.) He Judges unbelief (26-27)

- The last quotation of scripture in Acts is from Isaiah 6.
- It’s a word of judgment on unbelieving Israel.
- Just like Pharaoh’s heart grew harder and harder—some continue in rebellion and rejection. And God judges that hardened unbelief.

We get that picture in Rev 16.

Revelation 16:9 ESV

They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

The reality is that many live their entire lives and never repent and give God glory. He justly judges that hardened unbelief.

c.) God Has saving bounty (28)

- God’s mercy to save sinners is broad and wide—that’s the main theme in Acts.

Ephesians 2:4 ESV

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,

- This is seen in God’s plan to reach Gentiles. (v28)

› **God’s grace is truly unstoppable!**

› **God’s rich mercy is also invitational.**

Isaiah 45:22 ESV

“Turn to me and be saved,

all the ends of the earth!

For I am God, and there is no other.

Acts is a book that highlights the saving bounty of the Lord. I want to make two final appeals: 1) If you don’t know the saving grace of Christ, would you turn to him and be saved? His mercy is

rich and his love is great for even the greatest of sins. 2) For mission to continue, we need others to take the baton and bring the saving message of the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Conclusion:

We come to the end of our journey in Acts, started back in Sept 2019.

Acts has a longer title—Acts of the Apostles.

Our last picture is an Apostle—A Christ lover spending two years of his life on lockdown. Not a pandemic, but on house arrest.

He probably would have been chained at the wrist to a Roman soldier this time.

Is he discouraged? Defeated? Resigned?

No....*He is finishing strong for Christ.*

- The final words in Acts are words for finishing strong: bold and unhindered.
- › As Pastor Dennis mentioned on Wed night—the gospel is not on lockdown; the Word of God never goes into quarantine.

May we take courage to persevere in priorities and finish strong in the Lord Jesus.