

# The Rest of the Story

Studies in the Book of Acts

***“We will move the world not by criticism of it, nor conformity to it – but by combustion within it of lives ignited by the Spirit of God”***

*Vance Havner*

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Text

Acts 28:12-31

Topic

Paul’s preaching about Jesus angers those Jews who have grown dull-hearted towards the Lord

Title

*“Angry Flakey Hearts”*

**Acts 28:12** And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days.

**Acts 28:13** From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli,

**Acts 28:14** where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome.

**Acts 28:15** And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

**Acts 28:16** Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.

**Acts 28:17** And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: "Men *and* brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans,

**Acts 28:18** who, when they had examined me, wanted to let *me* go, because there was no cause for putting me to death.

**Acts 28:19** But when the Jews spoke against *it*, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation.

**Acts 28:20** For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see *you* and speak with *you*, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain."

**Acts 28:21** Then they said to him, "We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you.

**Acts 28:22** But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere."

**Acts 28:23** So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at *his* lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.

**Acts 28:24** And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.

**Acts 28:25** So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers,

**Acts 28:26** saying, 'GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY: "HEARING YOU WILL HEAR, AND SHALL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND SEEING YOU WILL SEE, AND NOT PERCEIVE;

**Acts 28:27** FOR THE HEARTS OF THIS PEOPLE HAVE GROWN DULL. THEIR EARS ARE HARD OF HEARING, AND THEIR EYES THEY HAVE CLOSED, LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, LEST THEY SHOULD UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEARTS AND TURN, SO THAT I SHOULD HEAL THEM." '

**Acts 28:28** "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!"

**Acts 28:29** And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.

**Acts 28:30** Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him,

**Acts 28:31** preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

## Introduction

There was no official retirement age in the ancient Roman Empire. There was a consensus that after the age of sixty a man could step down from his formal obligations as a citizen and live a life of leisure.

The apostle Paul was sixty. He was in Roman custody but would be released within the next two years. Retirement might sound inviting. After all, his body must be giving out on him. We think he had a chronic eye disease. In addition to the normal complications of getting older he had sustained many serious injuries in his missionary service. Five times in his life he'd been beaten by the Jews receiving thirty-nine lashes each time. Three times he had been beaten with

rods. He'd been stoned. He'd been imprisoned several times. He'd survived at least four shipwrecks. He suffered various perils, sleeplessness, hunger, thirst, weariness, toil, and cold. Add to all that he had a deep emotional concern for all the churches.<sup>1</sup>

Paul didn't retire. After his release he kept on serving the Lord. Scholars believe he made it as far as Spain before being rearrested and eventually beheaded in Rome in 67AD. He served his Lord for thirty years.

What was his secret? Was it supplements? Nutrisystem? Bowflex?

It was his heart. By that I mean his heart for the Lord.

We see the fullness of Paul's heart to serve the Lord as the Book of Acts comes to its end. We see a contrast as well. There are others of whom it was said their hearts **have grown dull**.

Your heart can be full or it can grow dull. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Exercise Your Heart To Sustain Its Fullness, and #2 Examine Your Heart For Signs Of Dullness.

## #1 Exercise Your Heart To Sustain Its Fullness (v16-23)

After the shipwreck Paul and his party wintered on Malta. We pick up the story of their travel from Malta to Rome.

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**Acts 28:13** From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli,

**Acts 28:14** where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome.

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<sup>1</sup> Second Corinthians 11

These verses are packed with spiritual vigor as Paul exercised his heart serving the Lord. First we're told he **found** brethren at **Puteoli**. He went looking for them.

Then he was surprised on his route by believers who journeyed some fifty miles from **Appii Forum** and **Three Inns** to meet Paul.

In one case Paul **found** the brethren. In the other they found him. Either way it reminds us to seek out fellowship with other believers. The fellowship of believers is a spiritual gymnasium for your heart to work out and sustain its fullness.

**Acts 28:16** Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.

Paul was guarded 24/7 by soldiers who would be chained to him on shifts. We know from reading Philipians, written by Paul during this time of house arrest, that his guards were getting saved and taking the Gospel in to Caesar's household. Sharing the Lord is another way we exercise our hearts. Pouring out the love of God to nonbelievers, our hearts remain full.

**Acts 28:17** And it came to pass after three days...

Stop there for a moment. **Three days** is barely enough time to get settled! It tells us Paul wasted no time trying to reach out to the Jews.

A sense of spiritual urgency is something that definitely strengthens your heart.

**Acts 28:17** And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: "Men *and* brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans,

**Acts 28:18** who, when they had examined me, wanted to let *me* go, because there was no cause for putting me to death.

**Acts 28:19** But when the Jews spoke against *it*, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation.

**Acts 28:20** For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see *you* and speak with *you*, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain."

If you read in-between the lines you realize Paul was being exceedingly gracious to the Jews at Jerusalem. He doesn't mention they tried several times to murder him. He describes his appeal to Caesar as something he did almost grudgingly and not as a counter-suit brought against anyone.

If you want to sustain a spiritual fullness of heart you must let forgiveness, mercy, and grace be your rule of life.

One way of letting those characteristics rule is by remembering the big picture. Paul wasn't bound because of the hatred of the Jews. He was the prisoner of the Lord on account of his preaching and teaching about **the hope of Israel**.

The **hope of Israel** was the coming of the Messiah who would fulfill all the Old Testament promises. It was and is Jesus Christ. Because the Jews rejected Jesus they hated Paul. Paul loved them – knowing they would perish unless they turned to the Lord. Knowing the eternal consequences keeps things in perspective.

**Acts 28:21** Then they said to him, "We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you.

**Acts 28:22** But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere."

Jews had been banished from Rome for ten years and had just recently been allowed to return. It's therefore not strange they hadn't received any official **letters from Judea**. Plus the Jewish authorities may not have wanted to pursue the case to Rome. If they lost they faced the wrath of Roman law as false accusers and perjurers. In fact, it might even give cause for Rome to recognize Christianity as an official religion.

The Roman Jews only knew that Christianity was **spoken against everywhere**. Should we be concerned about our image globally or locally? Maybe. But the way to overcome it is personally, one-on-

one, by loving nonbelievers regardless what they've heard about Jesus or His followers.

**Acts 28:23** So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at *his* lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.

What a great Bible study that must have been as Paul went through the Jewish Scriptures showing how Jesus Christ fulfilled all its promises and types and was still offering the Jews the kingdom of God. Even going all day and into the evening he couldn't exhaust the topic.

At age sixty, with a history of disease and a body that had been buffeted by many beatings, Paul was the most vigorous person in Rome. He exercised his heart by keeping focused on Jesus through and in the Word of God; by having a sense of urgency; by seeing people as eternal; and by finding the fellowship of other believers.

**There is nothing in that list we cannot do! Nothing even remotely difficult!** They are simple exercises that will sustain a full heart.

## #2 Examine Your Heart For Signs Of Dullness

(v24-31)

The powerful, anointed ministry of the apostle Paul met with mixed results.

**Acts 28:24** And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ demands a decision. Either you're in or you're out. There can be no fence-sitting.

What happened next is of crucial importance to our understanding of Bible prophecy.

**Acts 28:25** So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers,

**Acts 28:26** saying, 'GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY: "HEARING YOU WILL HEAR, AND SHALL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND SEEING YOU WILL SEE, AND NOT PERCEIVE;

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**Acts 28:28** "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!"

The words are from Isaiah 6:9-10. The Jews in Rome were acting just like the Jews of Isaiah's day. Both were rejecting God's Word. In Isaiah's day it led to the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians. In Paul's day it would lead to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD by the Romans.

If you want a detailed commentary on these verses read Romans nine, ten, and eleven. There you learn that because the Jews officially, as a nation, rejected Jesus Christ as their Messiah in His first coming God has postponed the kingdom on earth promised to Israel.

In the meantime **the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it.** Jesus is building the Church – a totally new and wonderful entity not comprehended in the Old Testament except in types and by certain allusions. Once the Church is completed the Lord will resurrect and rapture us to Heaven. Then He will turn His attention again upon Israel as a nation during the time of the Great Tribulation. It will culminate in the Second Coming of Jesus to establish the kingdom on earth. At that time all Israel **will** be saved.

**Acts 28:29** And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.

Believing and nonbelieving Jews entered into **a great dispute among themselves.** The dispute was the same as it always is. Is eternal life achieved, such as by keeping the Jewish Law? Or is it received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ? It must be received!

At the center of the Isaiah passage were the words **FOR THE HEARTS OF THIS PEOPLE HAVE GROWN DULL**. Isaiah wasn't the only prophet to speak about **dull** hearts. The prophet Jeremiah used the words **dull-hearted** four times.<sup>2</sup> It's not a word confined to the Jews either. The writer to the Hebrew Christians – whom many believe was the apostle Paul – warned believers they had become **dull of hearing** (Hebrews 5:11).

What are the signs of this terrible heart dullness? If we stay with our Isaiah passage the signs are hearing but not understanding because you are hard of hearing and seeing but not perceiving because your eyes are closed.

Hard of hearing may be more like what we would call *selective hearing*. You hear but either purposely ignore or pay less attention to things that you don't want to respond to.

Not perceiving because your eyes are closed means you shut your eyes on purpose and look the other way.

Isaiah's comments remind me of the passage in James where he says,

**James 1:23** For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror;

**James 1:24** for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

It's really the same thing Isaiah said. Because I am a [selective] **hearer of the word**, I am not a **doer**. Thus I shut my eyes to things the Lord is telling me.

The more I hear God's Word but either purposely ignore it or pay little attention to it and do nothing about it, the more my heart grows **dull**. The word **dull** can be translated *insensitive* or *thick*.

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<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah 10:8, 14 & 21; 51:17



OK, I'm scared! I don't want to have spiritual heart dullness! What can I do?

I can start an exercise regimen! Here are three suggestions:

1. If you've quit serving the Lord in some area, recommit to it.
2. If you're currently serving the Lord in some area, review your commitment and get a new excitement for it.
3. Ask the Lord for vision to launch out into something you've not done before.

**Acts 28:30** Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him,

**Acts 28:31** preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

That's it? That's the ending? No; it won't be the end until Jesus resurrects and raptures the Church. Until then the Book of Acts goes on in every place the Gospel is preached and taught. We are characters in the drama.

You never retire from serving the Lord. If you're planning to retire from some other career, seriously plan to retire into serving the Lord!

Your body may give out. But you'll have all the energy and vigor you need if your heart remains full.