

THESE ARE THE DAYS

ACTS 28:17-31 MAY 5, 2021

Many of you have been in the Valley long enough to have experienced the head-scratching anomaly that was 104.9FM. For over a year in the late '90s, if you tuned to that station, you would hear *Creedence Clearwater Revival's* rendition of *I Heard It Through The Grapevine* on repeat, day and night. You can find forum posts where people ask about this legendary oddity. Dig a little more and you'll find reports on it in both the *LA Times* and the *Washington Post*. There were "No commercials, no traffic reports, no deejays," just one song again and again.¹

At the time the station was owned by *Lemoore Wireless Co.* and broadcast from Tipton.² "Local radio executives speculate(d) that whoever got the license had money for a transmitter but (hadn't) set up a studio." After an innumerable number of repeats, whoever was behind the desk at KZZC made "...a shocking change and switched to different music: the Gladys Knight version of the song."

We've come to the last page of Acts. It ends in much the same way that it began: With a Christian proclaiming a message of salvation, founded on the Word of God. You could let Acts fall open at random and find the same thing happening in some place or another. Whether it was Jerusalem or Caesarea, Malta or Rome, prison or palace, a dungeon cell or a city square, this same song was repeated time and time again. Decades had gone by since Jesus ascended into the clouds, and a whole lot of fantastic things had happened, but beneath it all was the same melody, the same lyrics. God had come, was coming again, and was ready to save anyone who would turn to Him.

The last scene is not between Paul and Nero. It's not between Paul and one of the war-hardened Roman soldiers he'd be tethered to for the next two years. It's not a meeting of Timothy, Paul, Silas and Luke. No, it's yet *another* sermon being given to some Jews who had gathered together. But, of course, it's more than that. It's a sermon and example to us as well.

Acts 28:17 - ¹⁷After three days he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had gathered he said to them, "Brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors, I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

Despite all he had been through, we see that Paul was ready to get to work in Rome. In the midst of getting a place to live, going through administrative protocol of being handed off to the Praetorian Guard, he found time to write an invitation and have it sent to the leaders of the synagogues in town.

Some commentators feel that Paul had a *political* motivation for this meeting - that he was trying to feel out the Jewish community and see how they might react at his upcoming trial.³ But others point out that this was *always* Paul's pattern when he came to a new city: To speak first to God's people, the Jews, and then bring the message to the Gentiles.

William Barclay writes:

¹ <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1996-10-18-me-55284-story.html>

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1996/12/31/talk-radios-founding-father/4be1de18-9314-478b-b83d-c05c67f7436a/>

³ See *MacLaren, Barnhouse*

“There is something infinitely wonderful in the fact that...wherever he went, Paul began with the Jews. For...more than thirty years now they had been doing everything they could to hinder him, to undo his work, and even to kill him...yet it is to them first he offers his message.”⁴

He opens the conversation by calling them brothers and assuring them that he was not their enemy. This is a reminder that I know I need in my own life. Our enemies are *not* our enemies. At least, we should learn to see them as lost and helpless, rather than as opponents to be defeated. Our Lord said: “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”⁵

Matthew Poole writes:

“The whole economy of the gospel is a doing good for evil.”⁶

Paul *wasn't* their enemy. Look how gracious he was to leave out the murder plot, the illegalities of his arrest, the lies and the politicking. Why? Because he was so concerned that they be saved.

Acts 28:18 - ¹⁸ After they examined me, they wanted to release me, since there was no reason for the death penalty in my case.

Politicians are famous for pandering to a certain demographic to get votes and then, once they're in power, their true colors come out. A few weeks ago an article was being widely shared which said, “Pro-life evangelicals for Biden feel ‘used and betrayed’” by his policies.⁷ Now, in that case, President Biden hadn't misled anyone. He had made *many* pro-abortion promises. But, Paul wasn't just *saying* he wasn't anti-Jewish. A string of courts and officials had concluded the same thing. Lysias and Felix and Festus and Agrippa all recognized this man didn't hate the Jews. But then why, after such a long and careful legal process,⁸ wasn't he released? We saw why: The powers that be were unwilling to stand for what was right and true, choosing instead to bow to pressure and pick the routes that were the most advantageous to themselves.

Acts 28:19 - ¹⁹ Because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar; even though I had no charge to bring against my people.

Paul felt no grudge toward his people, but felt this appeal was necessary for his survival. There *were* times that Paul used the legal system and claimed his rights. It happened in Philippi and Jerusalem. But there's a difference between what he feels is *necessary* here and using the legal system to *attack* others. That's not what Paul did. He didn't countersue anyone. Though he had been maligned and mistreated, he goes out of his way to assure them that he has no quarrel with them.

We live in a time where Christians and ministries are becoming more and more willing to attack opponents with lawsuits. We need to be very careful and, as always, remember that *grace* is the way forward. There are times to involve courts, but it's not *every* time.

⁴ William Barclay *The Acts Of The Apostles Revised Edition*

⁵ Luke 6:32, Matthew 5:44

⁶ *Matthew Poole's Commentary On The Holy Bible*

⁷ <https://thefederalist.com/2021/03/07/evangelicals-for-biden-feel-used-and-betrayed-by-biden-fulfilling-his-radical-abortion-promises/>

⁸ <https://www.preceptaustin.org/acts-28-commentary#28:18>

Acts 28:20 - ²⁰ For this reason I've asked to see you and speak to you. In fact, it is for the hope of Israel that I'm wearing this chain."

The hope of Israel was a technical term that would've grabbed the attention of these Jewish leaders. The prophet Jeremiah spoke of "the hope of Israel" as God Himself who would leave His throne and arrive as a Savior in time of distress.⁹

Paul expresses to the Jews that his wish is to be at peace with them and to notify them about the coming of the Messiah.

When Jesus arrived He revealed that the hope of Israel was so much more than the simple liberation from Rome. The hope included not only a Savior and Sovereign, but resurrection from the dead and the promise of a future state in glory.¹⁰ This was important news that the nation had missed.

Acts 28:21 - ²¹ Then they said to him, "We haven't received any letters about you from Judea. None of the brothers has come and reported or spoken anything evil about you.

These Roman Jews keep things close to the vest, but it seems true that they hadn't received any tidings concerning Paul's case. After all the trouble of the previous years, had the accusers in Jerusalem simply given up? It's possible that their message hadn't arrived yet - communication by sea was suspended during winter months.¹¹ Or, it's possible that they knew, having lost multiple court cases, there was no point in trying again before Nero.

Acts 28:22 - ²² But we want to hear what your views are, since we know that people everywhere are speaking against this sect."

Rumors had begun to spread about these Christians - that they did all manner of immorality in their meetings. They would be accused of cannibalism, and detestable, criminal superstition.¹² There's a piece of ancient graffiti found in Rome, they think maybe from the year 200 AD, which shows a Christian worshipping a man with a donkey's head being crucified.¹³ Though it assuredly wasn't carved on the wall yet in Paul's time, it demonstrates that Christians were not held in reverence.

But, to the credit of Paul's guests, they were willing to hear a presentation about Jesus. Why? We have to speculate a bit, but for one thing, clearly Paul did not fit the caricature of Christianity that they had in mind. This was no mad, licentious cannibal. Here was a man full of grace, with Scripture on his tongue, discussing the Messiah who brings salvation to lost mankind.

What are the caricatures of Christianity today? Let's not live up to them! Of course, many of them are unfair and wildly inaccurate. We note that Paul didn't waste time arguing about cannibalism. Rather, his efforts were toward speaking the truth and winning people. And, because of his heart and the way he carried himself, they realized, "This guy has something to say."

As Christians, there's no point in us wasting our time with fluff. We've got a Messiah to communicate to people who are a few breaths from hell. When churches slip into a style of entertainment and feel-

⁹ Jeremiah 14:8, 17:12-13

¹⁰ Joseph Benson *Commentary Of The Old And New Testaments*

¹¹ Charles Ellicott *Commentary For English Readers*

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexamenos_graffito

goodery self-help, they miss the point. The Gospel isn't supposed to be the same as every Wellness YouTuber. It's the power of God unto *salvation*. It's the news that the Messiah has come and He's coming again. Paul got that idea across and it made these Jews want to hear more.

Acts 28:23 - ²³After arranging a day with him, many came to him at his lodging. From dawn to dusk he expounded and testified about the kingdom of God. He tried to persuade them about Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets.

A larger crowd came this time. Paul talked with them all day. Twelve hours. This is another one of those sermons that we wish was recorded for us, like Jesus' message on the Road to Emmaus or Philip's talk with the Ethiopian Eunuch. But, the truth is, we *can* piece together these sermons. We're given all the study material! God's word is here for us, waiting to be discovered bit by bit, day by day, as we dive into it and see God's heart, His work, His plan, His Kingdom.

We see that Paul used the Torah, he used prophecy, he talked about Christ, he talked about eschatology.¹⁴ This was a very well-balanced approach to Scripture, taking the whole counsel of God and bringing it together in his effort to convince them. He tried to *persuade* them about Jesus. To Paul, this wasn't just a casual talk like you have about which restaurant you should choose for lunch. It was like a hostage negotiation. Lives were hanging in the balance.

Acts 28:24 - ²⁴Some were persuaded by what he said, but others did not believe.

You know what this shows us? There is no magic method, verse, series of phrases or questions that will guarantee someone will receive Christ. These people were steeped in the Old Testament - they were faithful Jews - they had voluntarily come to hear Paul that day and they listened for 12 hours and *still* some did not believe. Sometimes we think, "Well if I was a better preacher or had more knowledge," or, "If that person heard a great evangelist, then they'd get saved." Listen: We're called to grow in our knowledge, but even the great evangelists of history didn't turn every heart. Because it *is* a heart issue. In the end, a person must make the choice whether they will taste and see that the Lord is good, whether they will take refuge in Him or face eternity alone.

Acts 28:25 - ²⁵Disagreeing among themselves, they began to leave after Paul made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah

This is an important doctrinal verse. First, we see another reference to the Trinity. Proverbs, speaking of God, says, "Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name and what is the name of His Son?"¹⁵ And here, from Isaiah 6, we are shown the Holy Spirit, who speaks and acts. And that's a second important doctrine we see here: The doctrine of inspiration. Paul is definitively saying that the Holy Spirit inspired the words written through this man, Isaiah.

Acts 28:26-27 - ²⁶when he said, Go to these people and say: You will always be listening, but never understanding; and you will always be looking, but never perceiving. ²⁷For the hearts of these people have grown callous, their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.

¹⁴ Stanley Toussaint *Bible Knowledge Commentary*

¹⁵ Proverbs 30:4

Paul had gone to lengths to show he wasn't against these Jews, but he wasn't just pandering to them, either. He rebuked the unbelievers and told them the truth. Like Isaiah, he (and we) have been sent to "go to these people and say." Say what? Say that sin separates them from God and that sin will drag them into hell unless they are born again. That's not what we want and it's not what God wants. He's ready to receive any traitor, heal any wound. But a person must be willing to soften their heart and turn toward Him in faith and surrender.

At the same time, there's a solemn warning here for those of us listening tonight. It isn't only the Jews who were able to harden their heart to the word of God. Ours can harden too. Hebrews tells us, "Encourage each other daily...so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception." And then, "Do not harden your hearts."¹⁶ We're called to guard our hearts in Proverbs.¹⁷ God is still speaking and leading and requiring of us. We don't want to settle and harden into some sort of traditionalism the way the Jews had. Instead, we should take up the words of Hosea, chapter 10:

Hosea 10:12 - ¹² Sow righteousness for yourselves and reap faithful love; break up your unplowed ground. It is time to seek the Lord until he comes and sends righteousness on you like the rain.

This is why we believe in the regular, systematic teaching of the Bible. It's why we try to prioritize prayer and being in God's presence. It's why we try to avoid traditionalism and legalism. So that our hearts can be plowed up, soft and ready for that planting or growing the Lord wants to accomplish.

Acts 28:28 - ²⁸ Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."

Stanley Toussaint (and others) call this the climax of the whole book.¹⁸ I wonder what the soliders thought as they sat there? They probably had 6 hour shifts,¹⁹ so there were at least 2 who had listened in that day. Do you think, back at the barracks they talked to each other? They were normal people, like us. "Hey, did you hear what that guy was talking about?" "Yeah. But you didn't hear the end - he said this has to do with us *Gentiles* too." We know that, because of Paul's two years in chains, the Gospel *did* spread through the whole Imperial Guard.²⁰

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

This verse is probably omitted or bracketed in your Bible. It's not in many manuscripts. Not to worry, even if it was an addition, the content has already been alluded to up in verses 24 and 25.

Acts 28:30-31 - ³⁰ Paul stayed two whole years in his own rented house. And he welcomed all who visited him, ³¹ proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

¹⁶ Hebrews 3:13, 15

¹⁷ For these insights I am indebted to Bruce Hurt and his work at <https://www.preceptaustin.org/acts-28-commentary#28:27>

¹⁸ Stanley Toussaint *Bible Knowledge Commentary* | Thomas Constable *Notes On Acts*

¹⁹ Warren Wiersbe *The Bible Exposition Commentary*

²⁰ Philippians 1:13

Paul was still open to receive anyone because the *Lord* is ready to receive anyone. He welcomes all who come to Him. During these years Paul would write Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon. And we get a sweet, devotional reminder that your home is a place for ministry of all sorts. Not just in hospitality or by having a Bible study meet there. God works through His people in all sorts of ways. The dinner table and the writing desk, the talk with the kids while you're putting them to bed and the prayer on the couch with your spouse. There was no Hall of Tyrannus for Paul to lecture in these 2 years. No Mars Hill or temple visits. Yet, we're told the ministry went on and went out *without hindrance*.

How can it be that he wasn't hindered while chained to a guard under house arrest, with a thorn in his flesh? That was his reality, but none of it could stop the work of God. In fact, he never complained about his chains. He wore them like a garment, or a tool belt to do a *different* kind of work for the Lord.

The circumstances weren't ideal, but they also weren't decisive. Because, as we were told at the very beginning, what we've been reading for these last 28 chapters is the story of what *Jesus* began to do and teach. And now, two thousand years later, the story goes on. *These* are the days of God's continuing work through His people, who have been sent out further than ever before, to every corner of the world. No longer are we limited to wooden boats sailing the Mediterranean Sea. No longer are we *waiting* for Luke to finish his books. It's all been handed on to us.

I can't help but wonder: Did Theophilus believe? Was he convinced about all these things? More importantly, are *we*? Seeing what we've seen it's made abundantly clear that God's work continues. You and I now take up the next chapters of the saga. We're not called to *copy* what we've seen but *continue* it. In that sense, here tonight might there be some 21st century Barnabas or Lydia? Some Cornelius or Tabitha or Timothy or Priscilla? Some Apollos or Simon the leather tanner?

These are the days of Christ's acts through us. The song remains the same. God has spoken through His word. The Messiah has come with salvation in His hand. He's coming again to establish His Kingdom. We are to spread the word and be *full* of His glorious life while we wait, watch and welcome others to join in.