

**ACTS 1:6-8; 28:16-31**

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**[CONTEXT: The Question]**

- There's a particular kind of frustration you feel when a story doesn't end.
  - You're watching a show, and you're invested.
    - You've given it six seasons.
    - You care about these people.
  - And then the final episode airs—and it just stops.
    - No closure. No resolution. No reunion. No arrest.
    - Just a character in some pensive moment—gazing at the horizon or walking anonymously into a crowd—and the credits roll.
  - You sit there on the couch and say, *What? That's it? That's how it ends?*
- Today, we come to the end of Acts.
  - And Luke shows us he could have written shows for Netflix...
  - Because he does exactly the same thing.
- He's given us 27 chapters of action—Jesus ascending, the Spirit descending, miracles and healings, arguments and beatings, preaching and church plants, drama and storms...
  - Then in chapter 28, he brings Paul to Rome—this climactic moment where Paul will stand trial before Caesar, the most powerful man in the world.
  - And before we hear what happens, Luke ends it...
    - Not with Paul's trial. Not with his release. Not with his death...
    - But with Paul, sitting in a rented house, talking about Jesus and the Kingdom of God.
  - We say: *What? That's it? That's how it ends?*
- And it raises a question for us this morning. WHY?
  - Luke is a careful historian.
    - He's been so thoughtful—so intentional—in constructing this book.
    - He could have told us the end of the story.
  - So why doesn't he?
    - Why does he end a 28-chapter masterpiece... mid-sentence?
    - Why don't we get Acts 29???

**[Transition]:** Let's enjoy our way through the last chapters of this book and see if we can make sense of it.

## [CONTENT: The Story]

- When we left Paul last week, he was in chains.
  - He'd been on trial before the Sanhedrin, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa.
  - And then he had appealed to Caesar—this was the right of every Roman citizen: to have your case heard before the emperor's court—which means he's bound for Rome.
- But his voyage across the Mediterranean does not go smoothly.
  - Before they leave, Paul warns them: **I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives (27:10).**
  - The captain and the guards refuse to listen and set sail anyway.
- And so the storm hits.
  - And it's no ordinary storm.
  - **V14** calls it **the northeaster**: It's a Mediterranean hurricane—and it drives the ship for days.
  - **V20**: **When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days... all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.**
- At this point—when every sailor on board has given up—Paul stands up.
  - Not to say I told you so.
  - But to give them hope.
- **VV23–24**: **For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you."**
  - The sailors are doomed. But Paul is protected.
  - And because Paul is protected—everyone on the ship is safe too.
- The ship runs aground and breaks apart on Malta, a small island just off the southern coast of Italy.
  - Even here, trouble awaits as Paul gets bitten by a venomous snake.
  - But he survives, and after surviving the winter—they all set sail again.
- And then, with understated simplicity, we read in **28:14**: **And so we came to Rome.**
  - He'd been trying to get to Rome for years.
  - And now—in chains, on a prisoner transport, after a shipwreck—he finally makes it.
    - Not the way he planned, and not on his timeline.
    - But God got him there—in his way, and in his time.
- And then—the book ends:
  - Not with a dramatic retelling of what happened in his final trial.
  - But with a simple summary of life as he awaited trial: **VV30–31**: **He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.**
    - No trial. No verdict. No release. No death.
    - Just Paul. Still preaching.

## [Transition]

- What do we do with that?
- As we close this series, let me suggest three things to take with us from this section.

## [CONSEQUENCE: The Application]

### First: God brings us to the place he's promised.

- From the outside, Paul's journey to Rome looks chaotic.
  - A **storm**. A **shipwreck**. A **snake** bite.
  - Delays. Detours. Disasters.
- But every one of them was part of God's plan:
  - The **storm** didn't stop him. The **shipwreck** didn't stop him. The **snake** didn't stop him.
  - Nothing could stop him—because God had said, **You must stand before Caesar.**
- Paul's journey is a miniature of the church's journey throughout the centuries.
  - Tossed by storms. Sometimes shipwrecked.
  - Often delayed, detoured, misunderstood.
  - But carried—always carried—by the sovereignty of God.
- And Paul's journey is a miniature of your journey too.
  - Most of us know something about storms.
    - The **career** you thought would work—didn't.
    - The **relationship** you thought would last—ended.
    - The **diagnosis** you never saw coming—came.
  - In seasons like that, it's easy to feel like the ship is going down.
    - Like God has forgotten you.
    - Like the journey you were on has been derailed.
  - But Acts tells you: God will bring you to the place he's promised.
    - It might not be the destination you imagined, and it almost certainly won't be the route or timing you planned.
    - But every storm, every detour, every delay—is part of the journey, and part of his plan.
  - When you're in the storm...
    - When you're exhausted, when you feel lost at sea, when life seems chaotic...
    - Remind yourself: *This is not the end of the story—it's just part of the journey.*
  - The God who carried Paul through storms and shipwrecks carries us too.
    - Jesus is the captain who never loses a passenger.
    - Persevere, dear ones—he will see us through.
    - Maybe not to Rome—but certainly to our heavenly home.

## [Transition]: God brings us to the place he's promised.

## Second: The gospel cannot be stopped.

- Remember how Acts began.
  - **1:8: You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**
  - That was the thesis of the whole book.
- And we've seen it happen over 28 chapters.
  - Jerusalem—chapters 1-7.
  - Judea and Samaria—chapters 8-12.
  - The end of the earth—chapters 13-28.
    - Now Paul arrives in Rome. The capital of the known world.
    - The gospel has reached the heart of the empire.
- And the last two phrases—while they don't tell us everything we want to know—are something of a punchline.
  - The gospel continues to go forth: **with all boldness and without hindrance.**
  - The gospel cannot be stopped.
    - It reaches those it's meant to reach.
    - It saves those it's meant to save.
    - It builds the church Jesus promised.
  - All the chains, all the storms, all the shipwrecks in the world—can never stop it.
- The church has been on this journey for two thousand years now.
  - Empires have risen and fallen.
  - Persecutions have come and gone.
  - The church has shot itself in the foot through its own failings—leadership scandals, political compromise, our everyday sins.
  - And yet—here we are.
    - Still preaching.
    - Still loving.
    - Still carried by our God.
- If you're tired this morning—if you're discouraged about the church, about the culture, about your own faith—remember:
  - The same Jesus who said, **I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail** is still at work.
  - The gospel that traveled from Jerusalem to Rome is still traveling—into Knoxville and beyond this morning.
- Nothing can stop what God has started.
  - We're not crazy for giving our lives to this.
  - In the end, God wins.

**[Transition]:** God brings us to the place he's promised, the gospel cannot be stopped, and...

### Third: Let's go back to the question we started with...

- Why does Luke end mid-sentence? Why no chapter 29—no trial, no verdict, no ending?
  - Because Luke isn't writing the story of Paul.
  - He's writing the story of the gospel church.
  - And that story isn't finished yet.
- We've covered a lot of ground in this series.
  - The church at its best—missional, Spirit-filled, gospel-centered, devoted, courageous, honest, obedient, unified, persecuted, engaged, resilient, faithful.
    - All of those are true.
    - All of those are biblical.
    - All of those have been modeled for us throughout this book.
  - But here's the thing I most want you to take from this series:  
**The church at its best isn't finished yet.**
- The story is still being written—and we're part of it.
  - We are not **spectators** of the story.
  - We are **participants** in the story.
    - The church is still moving forward.
    - Still preaching. Still serving. Still loving.
- Acts ends. This series ends. But the church at its best continues.  
**This is why people sometimes say—We are Acts 29.**

### [THE CLOSE]

- I recently heard Eric Gregory, a professor at Princeton, say, "*We might be the early church.*"
  - It's quite a thought, isn't it?
  - We talk about *the early church* in Acts as if we're nearer the end than the beginning.
  - But we don't know when the end will come.
    - Jesus might come back this afternoon.
    - Or it might not be for centuries to come.
  - Thousands of years from now, Christians might look back and call us the early church.
- What kind of story will we leave them?
  - What chapter are you writing?
    - A story of faithfulness to Jesus?
    - A story of witness, love, and grace?
  - Who are you writing it for?
    - Your unbelieving neighbor?
    - Your struggling friend?
    - Your weary spouse or wandering kids?

- Are you writing it with all boldness and without hindrance?
  - Is there fear you need to put down?
  - Is there a hindrance—a sin, a distraction, a compromise—that’s slowing you down?
- The question Acts leaves us with is not whether we understand the church at its best—it’s whether we’ll be the church at its best.
  - Someone is reading the chapter you’re writing with your life.
  - So this week:
    - Live as if God will take you to the place he’s promised. He will.
    - Live as if the gospel is unstoppable. It is.
    - Live as if the story is still being written. It is.
  - Do that—and you will live in such a way that makes it easy for people to believe that the gospel of grace is true.

## [CONCLUSION]

- Remember that show that just... stopped?
  - No closure. No resolution.
  - We’re left thinking, *That’s it?*
- In one sense, Luke ends Acts the same way—but there’s a real difference.
  - When Luke puts down his pen—he hands it to us.
  - Let’s write a beautiful chapter—the story of the church at its best.

## RESOURCES

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This list includes some of the resources used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles*.
- Ray Cortese, *The Mission: Clarified, Mobilized, Empowered*.
- Dennis E. Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*.
- Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Acts*.
- Alan Thompson, *Acts: A Commentary*.
- N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone—Part 1 and Part 2*.