



## A CHURCH FORMED: CHURCH SPREADS

Catalog No. 20130414  
30th Message, Acts 13-28  
Jordan Berry  
April 14, 2013

*SERIES: EPIC*

We have been going through the book of Acts. If you were here last week, you will know that we went through almost the entire Bible, up into the first twelve chapters of Acts. Today we are going to finish the book of Acts (through this EPIC series we like to go hyper-speed).

Let me recap just a little bit of what is going on.

Jesus had died and resurrected, and his disciples were together. This message of who Jesus was and what God had done through him was starting to pulse out further and further geographically. It began in Jerusalem, and it was pulsing out throughout Israel, throughout Judea, and throughout Samaria. The ground work had been laid through this guy we talked about very briefly last week, this guy named Saul. Through him the message pulsed out and exploded.

As the gospel was growing and growing and growing—growing right alongside of it was persecution and opposition to that message. People were trying to stifle the message, and leading the pack of that was this guy named Saul. In fact he was hunting down Christians from city to city, throwing them in jail, and having them killed.

One day Saul was walking to this town called Damascus, and as he was walking there, to go persecute some Christians by throwing them in jail, God got a hold of him. God showed up with a bright light and knocked him down and said, “What’s going on?” Jesus showed up and said, “Why are you persecuting me? Stop that. Don’t do it anymore.”

Saul was blown away with what God did. Saul, now called Paul, started to follow after Jesus and started to proclaim the very message that he was trying to stomp out. The way that he did this was that he traveled around from town to town sharing the message.

So Paul was traveling around, talking to people, setting up churches, and proclaiming the message of the gospel all throughout the land. In fact the book of Acts tells of this westward movement of the gospel and has a final destination point, a very intentional one, that you’ll hear about this morning.

As Paul traveled and began to preach, rumors started to spread about what he was talking about. Jews started to spread rumors that Paul was saying that Jews no longer had to follow Jewish traditions or customs, that they no longer had to circumcise their children or follow the feasts. As these rumors began spreading, the opposition to the message continued to rise.

Meanwhile, Paul said he needed to go back to Jerusalem to check in and see what was happening there. So, he went back to Jerusalem, and when he got there everybody, all the disciples and all the apostles, were very excited to see him. He told them stories of all the churches he had been going to, and of the scores of people who were beginning to follow after Jesus. Then they sat him down and said, “There is this rumor going around, and we know it is not true, but people are starting to say that you are trying to throw away Jewish customs and traditions. So here is what we propose, we propose that you go through a ritual to purify yourself as a demonstration that you are not going against Jewish traditions, but in fact, you are still following them as a Jew.” Paul agreed to this, and he went to purify himself in a seven-day process.

While he was in the middle of the seven-day process in Jerusalem an uprising began. All the people who had been spreading those rumors and had heard those rumors, started to get angry. They worked themselves up into a frenzied and grabbed Paul. They dragged him out and started to beat him. They were trying to kill him. (Paul has been in this situation before, lucky him.) The guards came, the Roman guards, and they dragged him out from under the pile of people beating on him. As they were dragging him off to arrest him, Paul said, “Can I speak to everybody who was just beating me?” And the guards said, “I guess, if you want to. What do you have to say?”

Paul then does something unexpected. He spoke to them in their own language. He spoke to them in Aramaic, and it caused all the people to calm down and hear what he had to say. He started to tell them a story, the story of how he met Jesus on that road to that town called Damascus, and how Jesus said that he was to go and proclaim this message. He ends that little talk by saying that Jesus himself said that God wanted him to proclaim that message to the

Gentiles. Here is how they responded:

Acts 22:22-29:

**<sup>22</sup>The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, “Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!”**

**<sup>23</sup>As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, <sup>24</sup>the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. <sup>25</sup>As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?”**

**<sup>26</sup>When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. “What are you going to do?” he asked. “This man is a Roman citizen.”**

**<sup>27</sup>The commander went to Paul and asked, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” “Yes, I am,” he answered.**

**<sup>28</sup>Then the commander said, “I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship.” “But I was born a citizen,” Paul replied.**

**<sup>29</sup>Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.**

Luke was the guy who was writing this story, writing Acts. He was a companion of Paul’s, and as he was writing he was starting to build this thing up. He was starting to show just what Rome meant. He was starting to show the power that Rome had. Paul was going to be flogged, yet at the mere mention of being a Roman citizen, people withdrew and in fact released him:

Acts 22:30:

**<sup>30</sup>The commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews. So the next day he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the members of the Sanhedrin to assemble.**

Being a Roman citizen gave him freedom. That was the power of being a Roman citizen. Luke was starting to build something. Right after this, the commander pulled in the Sanhedrin, the religious leaders, and said, “What is

going on here? Why are you guys so angry?” They started to fight amongst themselves and things started to get ugly. The commander pulled Paul out, because he was worried about his safety, and threw him in jail to protect him.

Check out what happens:

Acts 23:11:

**<sup>11</sup>The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”**

Jesus himself showed up to Paul in the middle of the night and said, “You are going to go to Rome, and you are going to tell Rome about me.” Rome was that final destination. Rome was the place that this gospel and the book of Acts had been working towards.

There was this plot by the Jews to kill Paul, the commander found out about it, so he sent Paul to a guy named Felix, the governor. Felix brought him in and said, “Tell me what is going on, what is your case?” The religious leaders came in with their case against Paul, and Paul gave his defense. Felix said, “This guy has done nothing to deserve death.” But Felix liked to cater to the crowd, was worried about releasing Paul because of what the Jews might do, and he was also trying to get a little bribe. He kept Paul in chains hoping that Paul would bribe him into letting him loose. But Paul never bribed him. In fact, it is kind of funny, instead of getting a bribe, for two years Felix kept calling him back and Paul just kept preaching to him. Eventually Felix was succeeded by a guy named Festus. Festus heard Paul’s case and the case of the Jews, and he said, “This guy has done nothing wrong. I am going to let him go.” The Jews got angry and said, “No, you can’t let him go. We want his head. Kill him.” Festus got scared. Paul started to sense that the tide was swinging against him, and that Festus was going to side with the Jews. So, Paul appealed to Caesar. As a Roman citizen he had the ability to appeal to Caesar. This meant that he was untouchable. They couldn’t do anything to him until he got to Rome, stood before Caesar, and presented his case. That’s power.

He was untouchable, not even the governor could touch him. Not even this mob of Jews could touch him. He was a Roman citizen. This is what started him off in the direction of Rome. He hopped on a boat and they made for Rome. He had a couple of stops along the way. He was ship wrecked at one point in time. He got bit by a snake after he was ship wrecked. Then finally he was back on a boat heading to Rome.

This is what happened when he got there:

Acts 28:11-20:

<sup>11</sup>After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island—it was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. <sup>12</sup>We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. <sup>13</sup>From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. <sup>14</sup>There we found some brothers and sisters who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. <sup>15</sup>The brothers and sisters there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these people Paul thanked God and was encouraged. <sup>16</sup>When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

<sup>17</sup>Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: “My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. <sup>18</sup>They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. <sup>19</sup>The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. <sup>20</sup>For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.”

Paul was giving a quick recap. He was telling the Jews in Rome how he got to the point: in chains and away from Jerusalem. He said, “I have nothing against the Jews. I am just defending myself here.” And he said, “I am here because of the hope of Israel.” He was bound with those chains because of it.

Acts 28:21-28:

<sup>21</sup>They replied, “We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. <sup>22</sup>But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.”

<sup>23</sup>They arranged to meet Paul on a certain

day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. <sup>24</sup>Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. <sup>25</sup>They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet:

<sup>26</sup>“Go to this people and say,  
“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;  
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.”

<sup>27</sup>For this people’s heart has become calloused;  
they hardly hear with their ears,  
and they have closed their eyes.

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,  
hear with their ears,  
understand with their hearts  
and turn, and I would heal them.’

<sup>28</sup>“Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!”

For two whole years Paul stayed in Rome, in his own rented house, and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly, and without hindrance, he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is the end of the book of Acts. It is actually a book that is not even finished. There is no conclusion to the book of Acts. Luke doesn’t write “finished” at the end. I think that there is a reason for that.

I started to think about the big picture as I read; about what God was doing here. It started to remind me of something he had done once before. You see, there was this man named Jesus, and you know all about Jesus. He came to earth as God and as a man, and he taught wise teachings and healed people. And Jesus, towards the end of his life, made his way towards Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the center of God’s people. Jerusalem was the heartbeat of God’s people. It was where all the religious activities happened. People flocked there from everywhere. It was their capital. It was the center of the people. Jesus said he made his way there to establish the kingdom of God. He was welcomed. People waved palm branches. They said “hosanna”. They were excited. You know the story... a week later he was killed. But, you also know he didn’t

stay dead. Three days later he rose from the dead to God himself.

I started to think about the story, asking God what he was doing in the story of Paul. I started to see the parallels. Paul was being taken to Rome. Jesus himself said to Paul, "You have to go to Rome." Paul was being taken by God to Rome, the center of civilization, the center of the world as it was known. Rome was the center of the most powerful country in the entire world. Jesus was taking Paul there, and he said, "You are going to have to proclaim this message in Rome."

We know from church history that Paul, a couple of years after he got to Rome, saw Nero. Nero let him go. Paul did a little more traveling, but then was quickly arrested, brought back to Rome, and then executed.

What is God doing here? What's the big picture message?

Here is what I think is going on. When God created everything he made it 'good', he made it perfect. But Adam and Eve ate of the fruit they weren't supposed to eat, and it created this rift. It ruined everything. No longer could they be one with God; no longer could they walk in the cool of the garden with him. This whole earth, this whole planet is decaying. You see it. You witness it. You see all the pain, suffering, and hurt that is here. Things deteriorated really quickly, and God had these things that he was doing. He picked the very best people that were left, he picked Noah and his family, the best people on earth, and he spared them, but he wiped out everyone else and everything else. Pretty quickly afterwards they stepped off the boat and everything went downhill again. God said, "I am going to establish my people, and those people are going to be the ones who will be my hands, and feet, and mouth. I am going to send them out and they are going to bless the entire world." That didn't work out because time and time again the people turned away from God. Then he said, "I am going to give you the law, you are my people and I am going to give you the law that will tell you how to live life. Obey it to the letter and things will get back to the way that they were." But he knew all along that that was never going to be possible. You see, I think that all these attempts that God made to restore creation back to health, back to the way it was supposed to be, weren't for him. He knew that they weren't going to work. They were for us.

I don't know if you every find yourself kicking against God, trying to do things on your own, trying to make things better on your own. God gave us a pretty clear outline throughout the Old Testament of him giving

opportunities for man to do it on his own, but he knew that it was never going to happen. But we needed to find that out for ourselves. He was starting something that was going to be so big. He started it with Jesus, when Jesus came to earth, when he marched into Jerusalem, when he was put to death, and when God raised him from the dead. It was God's way of saying that he had tried all these other things: he had wiped out all the planet except for the best on the earth; he had set aside a people who were supposed to bless everybody; he had given a law that if only it were followed all things would be right; and none of those things worked. And yet, there is this man named Jesus, who died and yet he raised him from the dead. God was flexing his muscles. He was saying, "I am the only one who is capable of restoring our relationship, capable of restoring our planet."

I think he was doing the same thing here in Acts when he took Paul and marched him right into the belly of the beast, right into the heart of the greatest world power. I think what God was doing in this book of Acts, as we watch this westward movement into the capital of the world, into Rome, was saying, "You know what? You might have the power to shackle Paul. You might have the power even to kill Paul. Yet, I am bigger than the biggest world power out there. I am bigger than death, and I have proved that with Jesus." That changed everything.

To me it is this crazy picture of how big God is. I think sometimes we lose track of God and just how big he is. I think sometimes we get overwhelmed with our problems, our issues, our hurts, our pain... and, sometimes rightly so because they are really hard, but something that we have to remember is that there is a God who is bigger than death, who is bigger than the biggest problem we face.

You might be here this morning, and you might not have known that there is a God out there who is trying to restore everything, and in fact, will restore everything back to perfection. We are living in a world where there is a big bite taken out of it, it is just not whole. It is just not quite right. There is so much pain and so much hurt, and yet there is a God who is big enough not only to be able to restore the earth, but he will restore the earth. He is going to do it through his son Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead. Maybe you are here this morning and you didn't know that. Or maybe you are here this morning and you have heard that, but you haven't known what to do about it. Or maybe you are here this morning and you already know.

What does this all mean for me, for you? I think what God has been doing in creating this overarching narrative

is saying, “You guys can’t do it on your own. You need me.” I think what he is trying to say is that we need him. What is our response to that? Jesus has something to say about that.

Luke 9:23-24:

**<sup>23</sup>Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup>For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.**

Things just got heavy. Things just got real. Jesus himself, who marched into Jerusalem knowing what his fate would be, is saying that we need to do the same. What about Paul, what does Paul have to say about this? In a letter to the very church in Rome where he ended up being killed, he writes:

Romans 12: 1-2:

**<sup>1</sup>Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. <sup>2</sup>Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.**

Do you get that? I think what is happening with the story of Jesus and what he went through, and the story of Paul and what he went through, is that God is setting up this pattern of what it means to follow after him. It is not easy. It requires sacrifice. It requires us to take up our cross daily and follow him. It requires us to offer our bodies as the living sacrifice.

I asked myself this week, and maybe this is appropriate for you to ask yourself today, “When was the last time you sacrificed for God?” I can’t help but think of Paul preaching to people and writing letters to churches, and in fact, when he came back to Rome and was arrested, he no longer lived in house arrest but in the dungeon. Yet, even there he was preaching the gospel.

It is hard for us to share this message of who Jesus is and what God is doing in trying to make this world right. And yet, that is the very message that transforms lives. It has transformed my life, and I think it has transformed a lot of your lives. It is the very message that we need to be

sharing. I want to read from Acts 28:27b again:

**<sup>27b</sup>Otherwise they might see with their eyes,  
hear with their ears,  
understand with their hearts  
and turn, and I would heal them.**

If you are here this morning and you are looking for healing, here it is. If you are here this morning and you have pain in your life, if you are here this morning and you just feel like God is not there – you can’t hear from him, if you are here this morning and you have never heard from God before, if you are here this morning and you are not even sure he exists... this is the message for all of us. Not only does he exist, but through his son Jesus, who was sacrificed for us, he is in the process of making all things new.

During this EPIC series we have gone through many era of biblical history, and we are already in the era of his church. That means that we are getting close, close to a restored creation.

I am going to pray for us. I want to encourage you that if you are here this morning and have never acknowledged that Jesus’ sacrifice for you was a gift from God in order that God might start the process of making you new, if you want to do that this morning, I want you to just pray to God in your head with me. If you are here this morning and you already have given your life to God, I want you to pray along with me also. Ask God what it means for you to offer your body as a living sacrifice? What does it mean for you to pick up your cross daily and follow him? What does it mean to pattern your life after Jesus and after Paul? Is there something in your life that you need to get rid of, that you need to cut out, that you need to give up, that you need to sacrifice? Are there people in your life who need to hear this message too? I think that is the important one. I think that we need to be out there sharing this message! It is a life changing message.

Let me pray and just pray along with me:

God, I want to thank you for spending the time showing us that we cannot make things right on our own. God, so often we try to fix problems, we try to make things right, we try to heal ourselves and each other, but God, through Jesus and also through the testimony of the story of Paul, you have shown us that you are the only one who is sufficient to make things right. And you have shown us that it is your intention to make things right. God we thank you for the sacrifice of your son dying on the cross

for us. God show us what it means for us to pick up our cross daily and to follow you. God show us what it means to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to you. God we thank you for your great love for us. I ask that you would give us boldness and courage to share of that love and the story with those around us who are hurting, who are struggling, who need some hope, who need some encouragement, who need to know there is a God who is so in love with them that he gave everything for them. God give us the courage and the boldness to share that. Allow us to sacrifice whatever we need to sacrifice to be able to. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen