



ACTS "29"—LIVING SENT TODAY
ACTS 28:17-31

Football season is finally here—Paul finally makes it to Rome.

Last week we saw that Paul got arrested in Jerusalem. He was transferred to Caesarea shortly after bc of a plot to kill him and he stayed in jail for 2 years before he was able to appeal his case to Caesar and be transferred to Rome for trial. All told, when we hit Acts 28, Paul has been in custody for about, 2 and a half years.

Now Paul's situation in Rome is a pretty relaxed house arrest. Vs 16 Only one guard watched him. Not in a cell, he was able to rent a place and generate enough income to pay for it. He could have visitors come in and out without hindrance.

And he uses every inch of this freedom. Right after he gets to Rome, he calls together a group of Jewish leaders and in vss 17-21 essentially says, "Hello my fellow Jews, I'm in a little court battle with...well, the Jews. I haven't spoken against Jewish customs or Abraham, the Romans don't even think I'm guilty—but they keep trying to harm me to I'm just trying to demonstrate my innocence." Vs 20, "I have asked to speak with you, since it is the because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain." I'm not a rabble rouser, the message I'm in jail for has to do with the hope we share as Israelites.

And so they respond, 21 "...We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. 22 But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against."

We haven't heard anything bad about you, but whatever you believe, everyone everywhere thinks it's not cool—but we'll listen.

"23 When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets."

One thing we can't fail to see about Paul is the way he saw every circumstance God placed him in as an opportunity to advance the Gospel. He was always under the impression that God had Sent Him into his circumstances—pleasant or not—and that his job was to be faithful where God had currently planted him.

"Live Sent" means that God has Sent you into your context. You're not a jellyfish floating helplessly in the current of life. God Sent you there. Even if you hate your current circumstances—Paul didn't like jail—but he realized that in God's sovereignty it was his current assignment and looking to time in the future where things settled down to really get serious.

Can't tell you how many people are waiting for the season in life to *really* get serious about Jesus and really hit their stride. Married. Kids. Job. Health. He sent you to your *current* situation!

And we have far too many people not being faithful in their current season because they're looking to the next season. Like a Master Chess player God has strategically placed every player on the board, not so they can chase their dreams, but so that they can advance the mission. You may not like your current place on the board, but until God moves you, live like you were sent there with a bigger purpose. God's Word to you is not, "Wait until just the right time, and then shine for me" but "You be faithful where I've planted you, and I'll make your life count."

That's what Paul does—and not just for a day or two. He doesn't know how long this is going to last vs 30 "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."

There's a period there. And that's the last thing Luke tells us about Paul—it ends on a cliffhanger. It's Homeward Bound ending before Chance runs over the hill at the end. We've been following this guy since Acts 9 and Luke doesn't tell us what happens to Paul. There's no, "and they lived happily ever after." And this may frustrate you, but remember what the book of Acts is, it's the story of how Jesus is establishing and advancing the church through the Holy Spirit—which means that one of the reasons there's not some definitive conclusion to the story here is that the story isn't over. God is still advancing his church through you and me. You and I are living out Acts 29 as it were and proclaiming the kingdom of God the Lord Jesus Christ.

And when it comes to the book of Acts we need to keep in mind that this is not someone else's story. We're not just reading about some people, in a place, back then. Make no mistake about it, if you are a believer in this room, what we've been studying is *our* story. There is a sense in which our church is 23 years old but there's sense in which our church is 2000 years old. And it started right here in Acts and what we're living out now is not a different story but the same story, chapter 2019, same power, same mission, same God.

And as we conclude this series today, I want us to give us four exhortations based on Paul's example here in Acts 28; 4 exhortations that will guide and help us Live Sent in our various contexts.

(1) We must be intentional about creating opportunities to share the Gospel.

Now there is a reason I didn't say we need to pray that God would give us opportunities. And there's not anything wrong with this necessarily—but too often people think they've been faithful if they ask for an opportunity, "I prayed for God to give me opps but no one asked me to share the Gospel with them—but I was faithful." But faithfulness isn't just reactive it's proactive.

People did not just walk up to Paul and say, "Will you tell me about Jesus." He went to the synagogues, he went to marketplaces, he rented a lecture hall, even in jail—he calls the Jewish leadership to him to preach and he's witnessing to the guards.

And this shouldn't surprise us. We plan for just about everything that's important to us. What are you doing to create opportunities for yourself to share the Gospel? What is your strategy for getting to know and building relationships with unbelievers? It's not just going to happen! Let me make a few suggestions for this—join some sort of club, some gym, take some sort of class, some sports league go to some regular gathering where there are unbelievers. Invite them to your house, invite them to church, invite them to Jesus. This is what it means to Live Sent.

Are we trusting in God to use us— absolutely! But trusting in God isn't a substitute to trying for God.

(2) We must be willing to sacrifice comfort and convenience for the sake of the Gospel.

And I remember someone giving a talk about folks who serve in the military. And they were recognizing, the incredible sacrifices so that we can enjoy the freedoms that we have. Remember they said, “They folks don’t sleep at night so that we can. They stay awake and watch so that we can go to sleep and rest.” And that’s so true and I’m so grateful for you.

But unfortunately, I think we take the same attitude toward Paul. “I’m so grateful he sacrificed so much so that I don’t have to. I’m so grateful that Paul took all the inconveniences that come with sharing the Gospel so that I can focus on my career and family. I’m so grateful he was willing to have it bad so that I can have it made.”

And friends that’s not true. Paul isn’t just a spiritual hero to be grateful for he’s an example we’re supposed to emulate. Obviously it will look different in 2019, but Jesus didn’t die to shield us from the pain of advancing the kingdom, he died to give us armor to wear while we do it, and the promise that our efforts won’t be in vain.

Can I tell you one of my biggest concerns as a pastor? Sermon series like have tremendous potential for good or for bad in the life of a church. They can either move us to disciple-making or harden us to disciple-making but they will not leave us the same. Paul even gives us a picture of what hardness of heart look like here in our text. He’s quoting Isaiah saying that what he prophesied about Israel is true about the Jews “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear and their eyes they have closed.” Now Paul is talking about their salvation—they saw Jesus up close, saw miracles over and over, heard Paul clearly preach the Gospel and said “It’s not for me.” This is what hardness of heart looks, regular indpeth repeated exposure to something that you’re always hearing but never doing or believing.

And the same can happen with a series like this. It’s possible to sit and hear over and over again and hear make disciples and say “yea I know but it’s just not really for me. I’d have to make big changes to my lifestyle if I’m really going to make disciples—and I know I should, but realistically I’m not, so just enjoy the music until we get to a series I can really apply to my life.” I’m pleading with you don’t do that—for the lost. For you! This series will leave more empowered for what we should do, or hold us more accountable for what we should have done. I believe how our church responds to this series in the next 12-18 months will set the trajectory for our church for the next 12-18 years. God help us be faithful to fulfil our mission even if it means saying no to some of the things we’d rather do.

(3) We must maintain an unshakable confidence in the sovereignty of God.

It’s easy for us to see Paul’s imprisonment as a tragedy. He was never under the impression that his circumstances were an obstacle to fulfilling his calling. He saw the as a vehicle to fulfill his calling. Paul never says, “God I could be so much more effective if I was in different circumstances. If I wasn’t in this jail, I could preach to more people and make a bigger impact. Isn’t this like putting your franchise player on the bench?” Never. He saw God as a loving Father who sovereignly placed him where he was and just saw each new circumstance as an opportunity to be faithful.

This was his mindset. We go to jail and think, this is an accident. For him it’s, “Rome, the next chapter in God’s plan to make my life count!” Paul’s in jail and he thinks, “Clearly God wants me to share the Gospel with this guard watching me. The visitor policy on my house arrest lets me receive guests so I’m going to

invite groups of people and preach to them. And since I have so much time, I think I'm going to do some writing. You ever read Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon? Paul wrote all of these during this Roman imprisonment. We have the book of Philippians, because God gave Paul a writing sabbatical in the form of house arrest! And in fact, you know what he wrote the Philippians while he was in custody? "12 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard[f] and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. 14 And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." Like this isn't how we would have drawn things up for Paul but it's how God did and we're still reaping the fruit of it is wisdom in doing so today.

Josef Tson—Romanian pastor David Platt told people about. He was being interrogated by six men, "What is taking place here is not an encounter between you and me. This is an encounter between my God and me. . . . My God is teaching me a lesson [through you]. I do not know what it is. Maybe he wants to teach me several lessons. I only know, sirs, that you will do to me only what God wants you to do—and you will not go one inch further—because you are only an instrument of my God. Every day I saw those six pompous men as nothing more than my Father's puppets! During an early interrogation I had told an officer who was threatening to kill me, "Sir, let me explain how I see this issue. Your supreme weapon is killing. My supreme weapon is dying. Here is how it works. You know that my sermons on tape have spread all over the country. If you kill me, those sermons will be sprinkled with my blood. Everyone will know I died for my preaching. And everyone who has a tape will pick it up and say, 'I'd better listen again to what this man preached, because he really meant it; he sealed it with his life.' So, sir, my sermons will speak ten times louder than before. I will actually rejoice in this supreme victory if you kill me." After I said this, the interrogator sent me home. Another officer who was interrogating a pastor friend of mine told him, "We know that Mr. Tson would love to be a martyr, but we are not that foolish to fulfill his wish." I stopped to consider the meaning of that statement. I remembered how for many years, I had been afraid of dying. I had kept a low profile. Because I wanted badly to live, I had wasted my life in inactivity. But now that I had placed my life on the altar and decided I was ready to die for the Gospel, they were telling me they would not kill me! I could go wherever I wanted in the country and preach whatever I wanted, knowing I was safe. As long as I tried to save my life, I was losing it. Now that I was willing to lose it, I found it."

Entrust yourself to the sovereignty of God as you Live Sent and allow him to multiply the effects of your faithfulness to honor him in your situation in ways you could never imagine.

(4) We must live with a relentless focus on eternity.

And I think one of the ways that enemy keeps us from maintaining this eternal perspective is not by tempting us with bad things, but by distracting us with good things. **Bride walking down the isle getting distracted.** Careers, cars, hobbies. And it's possible, to stand before God with a ton of achievements that amount to little more than impressive distractions. C.S. Lewis said the people who make the biggest difference in this life are those who are most focused on the next. And one thing you have to appreciate about is how focused and undistracted he was.

Paul was mostly likely released after a two-year stint in Rome. Enjoyed some freedom. It's during this time that he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus, but shortly after he was rearrested and at some point between 62-67AD he was beheaded by Nero. And as he's under arrest, he writes his final letter to Timothy:

“6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”

Yes we want Christ appear—we’re longing for that. That’s an eternal perspective. Hebrews 13:14, “For here we have no lasting city but we seek the one that is to come.”

As we have an eternal perspective, we’re not only reminded of our future as believers, but the futures of those around us who aren’t. 7,148 people groups, 3.19 billion people, or 41.8 % of earth’s population without the Gospel.

Have I been intentional about creating opportunities to share the Gospel? If not, how will I do that moving forward?

Does my general desire for comfort and convenience hinder me from regularly building relationships and sharing the gospel with unbelievers? What will I sacrifice?

When I'm convicted about not sharing the Gospel, what are my go-to excuses to help me feel better? What will I do to change?

Father, help me live with a relentless focus on Christ and eternity as I use every opportunity You've given me, not to advance my own kingdom and glory, but Yours.

Father, thank you that Your intense love for me is truly unconditional and doesn't depend on my performance, including my disciple-making. Thank you that Christ has done everything necessary to bring me back into right relationship with You and given me everything I need for abundant life now and forever.