

“The Invincible Gospel”
 Sermon for 18 January 2015
 Text: Acts 28: 15-31

More than one scholar has noted the anticlimactic conclusion to the book of Acts. Some have postulated that Luke intended further documentation and among them a few have suggested that he may have been martyred and therefore there is no third volume. What we do know is that the date for Paul’s arrival is probably 62 AD—and this comes from them the term of Burrus Afamus, A roman general, who may have singularly headed up the Guard at this time. There were usually two in charge, it is the exceptionality which makes Burrus’ term a historical marker. Paul is kept under house arrest due to some favor he held with Julius and therefore with Rome. Paul is there for three days, when he initiates a conference with the Jewish leadership. This suggests that the decree of Claudius had been lessened, or revoked. The Jews had moved back and settled in a place known for centuries, going forward, as “The Ghetto” or as “the Jewry of Rome.” The suggestion here is that Jews of the Diaspora, so-called, entered into this settlement pattern voluntarily . . . not as an act of discrimination. This tendency to keep to themselves alienated the Jews from other Roman citizens as did the exclusive marriage practices and strong family life (patriarchal primogeniture was a primary feature). Paul invited the leadership of the “free-man” Jewry to confer with him at his place of residence—these men were also Roman citizens. He did not come to their synagogue due to his Roman handler but his actions are consistent with his evangelistic pattern: going to the Jews (those with a biblical background) first and, upon refusal, turning to the gentiles. After the gospel initially separated the Jews, Paul continued preaching **without hindrance for about two years**—he practiced hospitality with all who came to him.

Paul’s conference resulted in the emergence of a phrase: **the hope of Israel**. Paul declares that he is under house arrest because of this hope. That hope refers to the messianic expectations of Israel, promises of a Savior embedded in the Old Testament beginning even prior to the time of Moses. (Deut. 18:15 see Acts 3:22) And Paul’s declaration is clear enough: Jesus, known as the Christ, is the fulfillment of that promise; He is the hope of Israel and hope for the world! (Matt.12:21: **The nations will put their hope in His name**-Holman Standard Bible) *This is to be our proclamation also.* Not only personally, **no one comes to the Father except through Me** (John 14:6) and **no one comes to Me except the Father draw him** (John 6:44). This is *the truth of the revelation of Christ that Paul received*, taught and passed on! And this is the truth, as received, that we shall pass on until the return of the Lord. The Jews, some of them believed as Paul taught them about Jesus, and others chose not to believe. To this divided crowd Paul cited Isaiah 6:9-10:

**9 He said, “Go, and tell this people:
 ‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive;
 Keep on looking, but do not understand.’**

**10 “Render the hearts of this people insensitive,
 Their ears dull,
 And their eyes dim,
 Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
 Hear with their ears,
 Understand with their hearts,
 And return and be healed.”**

**11 Then I said, “Lord, how long?” And He answered,
 “Until cities are devastated and without inhabitant,
 Houses are without people
 And the land is utterly desolate,**

**12 “The LORD has removed men far away,
 And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.**

**13 “Yet there will be a tenth portion in it,
 And it will again be subject to burning,
 Like a terebinth or an oak
 Whose stump remains when it is felled.
The holy seed is its stump.”**

This prophecy is given to pre-exilic Israel—prior to the nation’s chastisement for faithlessness. It is dismaying. It is also a very dismal call to preaching! Either for Isaiah, or Paul or the gopeller today. Yes, do go preach but no one will listen. WHY? Because they are under judgment for sin.

What is the drift of all this? It can be summed up thus: the point is Jesus. Yes, God is good. God keeps His promises. Jesus has come and reached out to you! There is a lot of boundary crossing going on here and some of the Jews simply are not ready to share God’s blessings in Christ with anyone but one of their own. They want to cling to prerogative and to privilege, pride and preferment. They want to continue to think of themselves as privileged—the Devil may have the hindmost.

If we were to take the book of Acts as a play, we would pick up and play our from where Acts ends. We would carry on because our act has not concluded. The acts of Jesus will continued to unfold through us, and our successors until He comes! The acts of Jesus through the Holy Spirit enacted by us . . . that’s the deal. We are to stay in the story, and stay true to the story, a story of redemption, restoration and recreation. We are an apostolic community, we persist in doing apostolic things. We will cross boundaries, perhaps spend time in jail, rent our own houses while awaiting trial . . . Acts 28:28 is an enheartening verse: **Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”**

The gospel is invincible. God's purposes are secure, His church will be established. Therefore, pray and go. The story is truly not "the acts of Paul . . . or the acts of me . . . rather it is the acts of the Holy Spirit through all the called.

Amen.