**PP** **Acts: To the End of the Earth**

**Part 66-Acts 28:17-31, *The End of the Beginning…* 3/11-12/2023**

As we jump into our final message in the book of Acts, let me remind you what may have been

lost on us which is this: **PP** *Acts is not about the Apostle Paul, it is about the mission that*

*Jesus Christ has given to the church, and the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill it*

**PP 1-The book of Acts is entirely focused on the mission of the gospel**

It is about to end not with the death of Apostle Paul, but with the proclamation of the gospel

I began this series by citing a scene from the 1982 movie, *Star Trek 2, The Wrath of Khan*, where

a computer simulation showed a rocket being fired to a lifeless moon

Called the *Genesis Effect*, it detonated on the surface and began to rapidly generate water,

oceans, forests until that dead moon was transformed into a life sustaining planet

In **Acts 1:8**, God fired a missile called the Gospel of Jesus Christ which detonated in Jerusalem

and it would rapidly spread around the world and bring spiritual life wherever it went

**PP *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My***

***witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”***

**Acts 1:8**

The Spirit of God empowered the church, filling her with boldness and power to proclaim that

anyone who trusts in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins will be saved

I’ve said throughout this long series that God is not asking His people to be expert theologians

who can explain and defend the doctrines of the bible

He’s not asking you to become a toastmaster, and He is not inviting you to a divine debate team

He wants you right where He has you, eyes open to opportunities He will bring to you, being

you, sharing what you know…but ever-increasing in what you know

As you study God’s Word, walking intimately with Him, you will have more to share

As we now approach the end of Acts, what we will see is that Acts has been but the beginning

The beginning of what would continue to unfold even to this day…the proclamation of the

gospel over the whole world

Paul is relentlessly focused on the mission of proclaiming this gospel and we see it in action

**PP *“After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews…When they had***

***appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers.”* 17, 23**

Paul, along with Luke and Aristarchus, arrived in Rome after their long and dangerous journey

He is able to rent a home where he is in house arrest with a soldier chained to him constantly, in

shifts, but he has not been convicted yet so he has freedom for visitors to come and go

Today we might imagine Paul is free with an ankle monitor, not allowed to leave the house

As he’d done through the entire book, he reached out to the local Jews first and they visited him

He explained what had brought him as a prisoner to Rome, and these Jewish leaders said they

had heard nothing about this, but they had heard about the ***‘sect’***, a Greek for heresy

The Jews called it the *sect of the nazarenes*, alluding to Jesus who was from the city of Nazareth

How they had linked Paul’s beliefs with Jesus was when he said it was ***‘because of the hope of***

***Israel that I am wearing this chain’* 28:20**

The ***‘hope of Israel’*** referred to the Messiah, the deliverer who would come and save God’s

people, and Paul was insisting that this Messiah had come, He is Jesus from Nazareth

**PP 2-Rejection of Jesus Christ has a divine purpose**

**PP *“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. And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement:”* 28:23-25a**

Repeatedly, Paul took the gospel message of Jesus the Messiah to the Jews first, they would

reject it, and then Paul would go to the Gentiles and scores would believe

True to this pattern, the same thing is about to occur in Acts 28

They put a date on the calendar, and this time, a great many of them came, and Paul took the

entire day to teach them the gospel, that the kingdom of God had come in the Person of

the King, Jesus Christ

Some believed, but most did not, and they began to argue among themselves

Paul said to them, **PP *“The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the***

***prophet: ‘Go to this people, and say, “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; lest they should***

***see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn,***

***and I would heal them.’”* 25b-27**

He quoted a prophecy from the book of Isaiah, where God had said that because of His people’s

unbelief, He would make them deaf and blind, they would not see and know the Messiah

when He comes

**PP *“What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest***

***were hardened, as it is written, ‘God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not***

***see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.’”* Romans 11:7-8**

The forgiveness of Jesus would be poured out on the Gentiles, as Paul tells them: **PP *“Therefore***

***let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will***

***listen.”* 28:28**

For a time, God would harden Israel’s heart, and during that time He would pour out His

salvation on the Gentiles, and it would make Israel jealous

There will be a day that Israel will turn to Jesus as her Messiah: **PP *“a partial hardening has***

***come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all***

***Israel will be saved”* Romans 11:25-26**

**PP 3-There is more to the story**

**PP *“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.”* Acts 28:30-31**

Almost all experts agree that Acts 28 does not mark the end of Paul’s life

**PP** While in house arrest he wrote *Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon*

Yet he was released after 2 years, apparently with Nero knowing his trial was a sham

Paul had expected this release when he wrote to the church at Philippi (**Philippians 1:19)**

When released, he likely embarked on his 4th missionary journey strengthening churches and

starting churches, but he came to a Rome that had an insane emperor on its throne

In July 18th, AD 64, a fire broke out in the city of Rome destroying 70% of the city

Nero successfully blamed the fire on the Christians, who mostly lived in 1 of the 14 districts

called the Circus Maximus, a slum district near where the fire started

This district was not consumed in the blaze, making them even more culpable, so he had 100’s of

Christians rounded up, some sewn alive into animal skins and lions set loose on them

Others were dipped in wax, then nailed to crosses and set on fire at night to light up his garden

while his guests would dine outside at his numerous dinner parties

Paul apparently returned to Rome, unwilling to let those Christians suffer alone, until Nero

arrested and martyred him by beheading, an execution for a Roman citizen

**PP 4-The End of the Beginning…**

It seems likely that Luke ended the book this way without telling us the rest of the story because

his account wasn’t about Paul, it was about Jesus and the mission He gave to the church

That mission is not yet finished, people still need to come into the kingdom of God

**PP *“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of***

***His beloved Son, in Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”***

**Colossians 1:13-14**

Brothers and sisters, the end of Acts is only beginning of what is now our turn to serve our God

**PP *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside***

***every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race***

***that is set before us”*  Hebrews 12:1**

Our race is run in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania where God has brought us to be witnesses

A state named after William Penn, who was a friend to the Lenni Lenape, or Delaware Indians

who lived in this region

William eventually died, and his 3 sons didn’t treat the Lenape well, especially sons John and

Thomas

Together with Bucks County Secretary James Logan, they began selling land to European settlers

that the Lenape still owned

They schemed of a way they could obtain a title to the land by showing them a doctored copy of

a deed agreement between the Lenape and William Penn from 50 years earlier, one that

had not yet been paid for

They showed the Lenape an inaccurate map of the amount of land in that agreement and offered

to buy from them as much land as a person could walk in a day and a half

Not knowing that the 3 schemers would mark out the trail before hand, cut away the brush, have

ferry crossings set up, and hire trained runners, the Lenape agreed to what would later be

called, The Walking Purchase

**PP MAP** Walking to the Lenape was a leisurely stroll so they had no idea that on September 19,

1737, they would lose to the Penn brothers land almost as large as Rhode Island, what is

today Northampton, Pike, Monroe, Carbon and Bucks counties and at the center of it all,

was Easton, Pa

**PP SIGN** It was just after this deceptive land grab that God sent a young man, David Brainerd,

to Easton to witness of Jesus Christ to the Lenape who remained in the area

**PP PIC** He led Lenape Chief Moses Tunda Tatamy to salvation, who then became his interpreter

Around the same time, in 1738, a doctor who was expelled from Germany for practicing

witchcraft, moved into Raubsville, Pa just below Easton

Johann Peter Seiler established a successful folk medicine practice using herbal remedies,

charms, magical spells and a laying on of hands treating people all along the east coast

He eventually owned hundreds of acres of land, including land near Hexenkopf Rock

He was one of the first non Indians to hold powwows, where he would reportedly heal sick

people by drawing evil spirits from them and trapping them into the rocks of that hill

He died on January 8, 1803, his tombstone marked with a carving of a six-pointed flower drawn

with a compass that was intended to keep evil spirits away

His son Peter, Jr, changed their family name to Saylor, and expanded his father’s witch practice,

becoming known for his magical abilities to call down power and heal the sick

Friends, the history of our city is full of deception and demonic power

There is a perceivable spiritual darkness as you travel eastward in the Lehigh Valley and our

church is a light in that darkness, bringing the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ

The end of Acts is merely the end of the beginning, for now **PP *“will be [Christ’s] witnesses in***

***Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* Acts 1:8**

Pray