

Explore the Bible: Always on Mission

February 6, 2018

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Feb. 25 focuses on Acts 28:17-28.*

As we wrap up our study of Acts, we acknowledge the beginnings of Christianity (a “sect” of Judaism at that time) and the early mission movements were no easy ventures. Those who followed “The Way” were going against the grain of their known religious practices.

While we champion the Apostle Paul today and all who took part in this story, we must realize they did not receive a “pat on the back” from many. Instead, they worked through their persecutions, because the gospel message was worth it. The gospel was—and is—for everyone.

As you open this lesson, consider letting your group know how grueling this trip to Rome was. Paul did not simply appear in Rome after Jerusalem. His journey in Acts 27-28 brought both trial and opportunity. It took a lot out of him, no doubt. We can learn from Paul that in our journey of life as Christians, we must endure trials as we share the good news with everyone we come into contact with.

The Journey (Acts 28:17-20)

Continuing with his practice, Paul met with the Jewish leaders to insist on his innocence of the crimes attributed to him in Jerusalem. Keep in mind that “The Way” was a sect of Judaism, so Paul still saw himself as a Jew. Even so, he wanted to extend this message of hope in Christ to these Jews in Rome.

Paul saw each place as an opportunity to meet the need of people for salvation. So, we know his motive. He is making inroads to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. He also would try to prove Jesus' message by citing Jewish heritage and Scriptures.

Focus on this: Paul saw himself as innocent of the Jew's accusations, and he was trying to convince this Roman Jewish audience he was innocent. As J. Bradley Chance points out, though, the listeners here might be wondering: "If Paul were so innocent, why is he in Rome living under guard?" (J. Bradley Chance, *Acts*, 522).

How well do we listen to the message of a person who claims to be innocent, but does not look so innocent? Also, ask your group: Will you receive what someone says if you do not know or trust that person? For these to receive the message, they first needed to trust the messenger. The same is true for us when we share any message—particularly the gospel.

The Seekers (Acts 28:21-23)

Curiosity must have set in with these people. Not only had they heard of Paul, they had heard good things and had not received a bad report from Jerusalem. By this time (*do not miss this*) they had only "heard of" this gospel movement.

So, they asked for more. There is no more fertile soil for growing a person's faith than an openness and willingness to listen, learn and engage. We must look to these Jews in this positive light. It is a fearful thing to be told, "No," when you share your faith story; however, it is encouraging to be told, "Keep talking."

Let's propose sharing the gospel with others as a "conversation." It's a time to share, listen and engage. When we treat seekers and those without faith with respect by engaging them in conversation, we invite them to keep

listening, keep learning and keep engaging. *How would we better serve the gospel by treating it as a conversation?*

One more thing to notice: Patience is central to sharing with seekers. We are shown that Paul engaged a large number of people “from morning till evening,” sharing the same message. He dealt with every response, and patiently toiled through each conversation ... in his own room, no less!

The Response (Acts 28:24-28)

Even though we get this direct quote from Isaiah about the unbelievers’ hard-heartedness, we cannot miss out on the fact that “some were convinced.” People who came as seekers and unbelievers now were becoming interested listeners and even believers.

Why would Paul speak these convicting words to the unbelievers and disputers? Simple. The prophetic words were meant to be spoken and heard. God gives his warnings through these voices. And these unbelievers needed to be warned from God’s very own words.

In spite of all this, Paul continued to preach and teach, sharing the gospel in this new context. We also need to keep on sharing this message, even if we hear “no” more often than “yes.” The message of the gospel is a message this should always be shared and never be silent.

Consider asking your group: *How can we encourage ourselves to keep sharing, even when we have been rejected?* There is an opportunity for your group to band together communally for encouragement and accountability. As we are always on mission, we are always supposed to share Christ with others.

Conclusion

As a group, read the closing sentences of Acts 28:30-31. Quite simply, we are told how Paul went from that initial meeting with Jewish leaders. From tradition, we are led to believe he continued until his own death in Rome a couple years later.

We see hospitality, courage, mission, proclamation and holding fast to the coming of Christ's kingdom—a kingdom that will make all things be as they should be. In these latter verses, we see Paul living out a life not too much different than ours (minus the house arrest). *How does this fact encourage us?*

The ending of Acts encourages us to ask the question: *Where do we go from here?* Let this be a closing question for your group. But be sure to answer that we keep doing what we have been called to do: Live and share, always!

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