

Listen Up – Acts 28:11-31

Acts 28:11. This is our last message in Acts, and it's been quite a journey. 54 sermons, almost 2 years, and a whole lot of application.

Not to mention a whole lot of ground, tracing the Apostle *Paul's* journeys all over the Mediterranean. (**Map 14 – ESV Study Bible**, last page)

It started in **Jerusalem** with the instruction and prophecy of Jesus to the Apostles, saying . . .

“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.”

And here we are; continuing the journey. **Compelled** by the Spirit and compelled by the Gospel, just like they were. Compelled to obey and compelled to share.

At least that's been my hope and prayer; for us.

➤ But there's one *more* chapter to Paul's journey (**Intro**), and a very timely exhortation within it.

And if you've ever been in a sports huddle, you've no doubt heard it.

Maybe it was a timeout when you needed a kick in the pants, or a crucial point in the game when everybody needed to focus.

My high school basketball coach said it all the time; Mr. Leemhuis.

We'd come over to the bench, he'd kneel in front of us, and the first words out of his mouth were, “Okay, listen up.” And we knew to be quiet and open our ears.

Because the instructions he gave were crucial to doing what was best. Crucial to running the play. Crucial to winning the game.

Especially if it was the *last* play of the game; like it is here.

This is it; the end-of-Acts huddle; the final chapter. And the Holy Spirit, through the pen of Luke and example of Paul, is saying . . .

“Listen up. Him who has ears to hear, let him hear.” (Mt 13:9)

So follow along with me starting in **v11**, and let's see what God has for us.

➤ [11] *After three months (Map) we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, [the island of Malta remember, where Paul and 275 others were shipwrecked after setting sail from Jerusalem.]*

Paul had appealed to Caesar in his trial and imprisonment, so off to Rome they went.

And along the way, got caught in a storm that almost took their lives.

But they ran aground on the island of Malta, received help from those who lived there, and hitched a ride on another ship 3 months later.

[11b] *A ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead.*

Most likely the Roman gods Castor and Pollux, believed to protect sailors, carved into the bow.

Whether this was Luke's effort to identify the ship, or a subtle way of saying that *God* is our protector because they're just *figureheads*, we don't know.

Either way, they got on a ship.

[12] *Putting in at Syracuse [located on the east end of Sicily], we stayed there for three days. [13] And from there we made a circuit [probably a roundabout journey of tacking back and forth due to the wind] and arrived at Rhegium [on the toe of Italy's boot]. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli [257*

miles north]. [14] *There we found brothers [brothers and sisters in Christ; believers] and were invited to stay with them for seven days [more provision]. And so we came to Rome.*

[15] *And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum [or marketplace] of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us [two towns, 40 and 28 miles south of Rome]. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage [key verse]. [16] And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him [a house-arrest situation where Paul would have been chained to a guard by wrist shackles].*

The first exhortation in this end-of-Acts huddle, by way of example, is to . . .

Pay attention to God's grace in your life. (v11-16)

That's what Paul did.

After the grace of God's protection and provision, he thanked God and took courage.

v15b – *On seeing them [the brothers and sisters in Christ who had traveled from Rome to meet him], Paul thanked God and took courage.*

Two indicators, that he was paying attention. Think about it.

God had just protected him from a massive storm, delivered him to his destination, provided for him along the way, and connected him with the saints.

Fulfilling his long-time desire to meet them.

That's grace. All of it. Unmerited favor.

And Paul thanked God. It wasn't lost on him. He didn't just take it for granted and move on. And he certainly didn't *presume* on God's grace; *expect* it.

He acknowledged it, and gave thanks. That's the play we need to run.

Pay attention to God's grace in your life, and **give thanks**.

But don't stop there. **Take courage** as well. Take *courage* from God's grace in your life.

Pay attention to his goodness and greatness, keep it in mind, and draw strength from it.

That's what Paul did. On seeing the other believers, he renewed his hope, and bolstered his resolve.

Spurring him on for the days ahead, and sustaining him in days of difficulty.

➤ I heard a podcast recently, where **Andrew Brunson**, the pastor who was imprisoned in Turkey for two years, talked about his experience. And two things struck me.

(1) How near to giving up he was. Even considering suicide at times. It was that bad.

(2) How much the Lord ministered to him by bringing to mind his *presence*. His goodness and grace to be *with* him; near him. It was grace.

And if Pastor Brunson had not paid attention to that, had he not recognized it, or even ignored it because he was so down and out . . .

We might be talking about his tragic death instead of his miraculous perseverance.****

Pay attention to God's grace in your life.

His *favor* in the past. His kindness in the present. His provision, in both bad times *and* good. His protection in the *storms* of life. His mercy to withhold what you deserve.

His blessing of fellowship; with other *believers*. And especially the ongoing, never-ending grace of his *presence* in your life.

Pay attention, give thanks, and take courage. (**Summary**)

➤ Second, the second truth we need to hear, comes from [v17-22](#).

[17] After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews [that was his M.O.; to the Jews first], and when they had gathered, he said to them, “Brothers, though I had done *nothing* against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

[18] When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. [19] But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar—though I had no charge to bring against my nation. [It was all a matter of defense.] [20] For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel [their salvation, their deliverance] that I am wearing this chain.”

Paul went straight to the Jews, to fill their heart with the Gospel.

[v21](#) – And they said to him, “We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. [In other words, we don’t know *anything* about you; good or bad.] [22] But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect [Christianity] we know that everywhere it is spoken against.”

Paul was there to fill their heart, while they were there to fill their head. Leading us to this: **Listen with your heart, not just your head. (v17-22)**

Paul’s like, “I’m here for you; for your salvation.”

And they were like, “We’re here for the scoop; the buzz. [v22](#).

“We desire to hear from you what *your* views are [what you think as opposed to what we think], for with regard to this sect [people are talking].” That’s the idea.

“So give us the scoop, Paul? The *inside* track.” That was *their* motive; their desire.

And because of it, they listened with their head instead of their heart.

Just like people today. For whom church is purely an intellectual exercise. Something to think about. Something to know.

Maybe that’s you. Does all this just stop at your head?

If so, you’re in trouble. Because Jesus didn’t say *knowing* about me is the way, the truth, and the life; but *believing* in me. Embracing me. Loving me.

He didn’t say if you pass the *quiz* about me you’ll avoid hell; he said if you *repent* you will.

Which means we must listen with our heart, **not just intellectually** with our head.

Or maybe you come to church to satisfy your curiosity (**Not just out of curiosity**). To scratch your itch, but that’s it.

If so, you too are in trouble. Because curiosity for curiosity’s sake, kills the soul just like it kills the cat.

Or maybe you’re here to placate someone else (**Not to placate someone else**). Your spouse. Your parents. Your friend.

Maybe you come week in and week out because *they* want you to. Or every now and then to make them happy; get them off your back.

I remember one man, a husband, who came for *years*, only because it made his wife happy. That’s what he told me.

“I don’t believe any of this,” he said, “I just come to make her happy; keep the peace.”

Can I tell you something? Hell is *full* of people who listened like that.

Don’t go there. Don’t do that. Listen with your head *and* your heart. Hear *and* embrace God’s Word. Know it *and* apply it. Consider it *and* receive it.

Whether it’s the Gospel to be saved, or the truth (**Bible**) to be sanctified.

Otherwise you’ll go from bad to worse in life, and end up with no life at all.

Listen up. (**Summary**)

➤ Third, in this end-of-Acts huddle, is a warning. [v23-28](#).

[23] When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in *greater numbers* [not just the leaders]. From morning till evening he expounded to them [explained in detail], *testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets* [the entire Old Testament]. [24] *And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved* [rejected it]. [25] *And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement:*

“The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: [26] “Go to this people, and say, “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” [27] 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.’ [28] Therefore let it be known to you [Paul says] that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”

It’s an indictment found in Is 6:9-10, where God tells Isaiah, to tell the people in *his* day, the very same thing.

Namely, that your hearts are hard, your ears are plugged, and your eyes are closed.

So much so, that you’re *never* going to understand. *Never* see. [v26](#) – “You will indeed hear but *never* understand, and you will indeed see but *never* perceive.”

And Paul says the same to the unbelieving Jews in front of *him*. “You’re not only part of the same people, the same lineage, you’re just like them,” he says.

Why? Because their hearts were dull (27) – *insensitive* to the things of God, and incapable of *understanding* them. That’s the idea.

A commentary not on their intellect, but their *disposition*; their mindset, their pattern.

To think only of themselves; only about the desires of their flesh; only about the things of this world. It dulled them.

Not only that, but their *hearing* was shot. They couldn’t even *perceive* truth, let alone embrace it. They were blind. Clueless to eternal things . . .

And oblivious to the reality of their sin and need.

It was a dire warning, to wake up and listen up.

➤ But they wanted no part of it. Not only *disbelieving*, but leaving.

Lest they should see with their eyes [v27b] and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn [repent], and [God] would heal them.

They had become so *obstinate*, so entrenched in their ways and thinking, so comfortable with their way of life, so hard and dull of heart . . .
That they not only refused to turn to *God*, but refused to admit their terminal illness: the condemnation of their soul.
Like somebody who refuses to go to the doctor for their cough. And after a while, convinces themselves it's no big deal.

Is that you? If so, stop.

Don't be obstinate. (v23-28)

Don't be stubborn; close-minded; foolish.

Hardening your heart, plugging your ears, and closing your eyes. Knowing good and well the handwriting is on the wall, but refusing to look at it.

Just stop. Stop refusing to think about anything that makes you feel uncomfortable.
Stop filling your ears with the noise of this world, and the lies of Satan, and the siren song of your flesh so that everything else is drowned out.
Stop turning a blind eye to the certainty of your sin; the destiny of your soul.
Just stop. Be obstinate no longer.

Open your eyes and *face* the music. And rest assured that when you do, it will be the most beautiful sound you've ever heard.
Repentance may be ugly, but grace is beautiful.

Open your heart and receive forgiveness. Life. Peace. Joy. Glory.
Open your ears and listen up. Reject the Gospel no longer; before it's too late.
Don't be obstinate. (**Summary**)

And last, in this final huddle . . .

Keep on keeping on. (v30-31)

√30. Because there *is* no v29. It's not *in* the earliest manuscripts.

It was included in the original King James version, based on some *later* manuscripts, the best they had in the early 1600's . . .

But it's not in the earliest manuscripts that we *now* have. So most translations leave it out. Justifiably so.

[Nonetheless, v30] *He lived there two whole years at his own expense [Paul did], and welcomed all who came to him, [31] proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.*

True to form, Paul didn't let *anything* keep him from keeping on.

In fact, he wrote 4 of the New Testament *epistles* while imprisoned in Rome: Ephesians, Colossian, Philippians, and Philemon.

And preached the Gospel just like the first Apostles did at the *beginning* of Acts.

Because that's what Jesus desires and requires of us. That's what the Spirit empowers and compels in us.

So whatever you do, keep on keeping on. No matter what. It's the end of Acts, but keep on. Keep on loving the Lord, keep on living for the Lord . . . (**Summary**)
And keep on talking about the Lord. Paying attention to God's grace, listening with your head *and* your heart, and never ever obstinate. Listen up.

Prayer – Lord, give us ears to hear and eyes to see. Open our hearts and fill them with your love; your presence; your grace. And compel us to share the Gospel and live for you, more and more.