

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

R2L: Promoting the Kingdom of God

Acts 28:30-31

30 And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

It was a dangerous thing to be a true believer in England during the early 1500's. In the year 1519, seven Christians were brought into a courtyard near the prison in Coventry, England. And why were there “Christian” prisoners? What crime had these “Christians” committed? The egregious act they were guilty of is having taught their children how to recite the Lord's prayer in the English language. For this “crime” they were brought out, ropes were tied around their waists, hands, and feet, they were secured to large wooden stakes and bundles of wood and hay were stacked around their feet. The quiet moment was broken as the sentence was read (and I quote), *“Only the Latin scriptures are considered holy. The Bible in any other language, including English, is heresy, and anyone quoting the holy scriptures in English is guilty of heresy.”* The executioners lit the hay with fire and these seven Christians were made martyrs for speaking the Word of God in English.

And just who was responsible for making the Word of God available in English resulting in a spiritual revolution in England? William Tyndale. Tyndale had decided to translate the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew texts of Scripture into English. It was time, he wrote, *“to give the plough boy a copy of the Bible that he can read for himself.”* William Tyndale was more successful than he could have imagined as his translation of the Bible soon became the most sought after book in England. The Roman Catholic Church would not stand for this and quickly mounted a vicious attack against Tyndale's Bible. They severely persecuted and punished anyone who owned a copy of it. In a short time, prisons were overflowing with Christians and hundreds of Tyndale's New Testaments were burned. Not only were Bible's burned but even believers were even publicly burned at the stake with Tyndale's New Testament tied around their necks.

In time, the “authorities” caught Tyndale and after eighteen months in prison, in October of 1536 (438 years ago), he was burned at the stake. The last words Tyndale uttered from the flames were, *“Lord, open the eyes of the King of England.”* It took about 100 years, but God answered this prayer. For in 1604, King James I of England authorized an “English” translation of the Bible and named it “humbly,” after himself – The King James Bible. The great irony of all this is that ninety percent of the first edition of the King James Bible published in 1611, was nothing more than a copy of the English translation of William Tyndale. In many ways, the apostle Paul uttered similar prayers as Tyndale from his own Roman incarceration. Paul, who after the Lord Jesus, was an instrumental tool in the rise and spread of Christianity. Like Tyndale, Paul would also die for his faith; for unceasingly proclaiming the Word of God.

Let me invite you to turn to Acts 28 for the last time in this series. We will be looking at the last two verses of this chapter. But as you turn there, let me remind you, that when we first opened the book of Acts, the Lord Jesus was giving the disciples the mandate (a directive; a command) to take the gospel to the remotest part of earth. Of course, the disciples obeyed the Lord Jesus, and in the book of Acts, Luke has shown us how the gospel reached throughout Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and now, even to the remotest part of the earth. The gospel was now in the very center of the civilized world; Rome. And after just a few more words, words we will read, Luke put down his Holy Spirit inspired quill for the last time. From these last two verses of Acts 28, I intend to point out to you three things; the content of Paul's final messages; the confinement of Paul's final movements; and finally the commitments of Paul's fervent motivations.

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

I. The Content of Paul’s Final Messages

Let us read Luke’s last paragraph in Acts, chapter 28, verses 30 and 31 we read, ***And he [Paul] stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.*** From these verses we find Paul focused on two points which serve as the content of both his preaching and teaching.

A. The truth about the kingdom of God.

Two times in this chapter Luke makes reference to Paul’s preaching ***“the kingdom of God”*** – here in verse 31 and up in verse 23. What is meant by this phrase; ***“the kingdom of God”***? In its most specific sense, ***“the kingdom of God”*** refers to the coming earthly kingdom that follows the seven year tribulation period, where Jesus Christ, the King of kings, will rule and reign for a thousand years. Part of Paul’s message was seeking to point his hearers to the fact that the Messiah will rule one day in the New Jerusalem.

But there is a broader sense of the phrase, ***“the kingdom of God”*** that refers to the realm over which God is King; where God’s statutes, principles, and ways are obeyed and followed; and where His name is honored and glorified. In this sense, the kingdom of God is here and now. God rules and reigns in the hearts of His people. His people, transformed by saving grace, are, as Paul said in Titus 2:14, ***“zealous for good works”*** – that is, in obeying and worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ. When Paul preached the kingdom of God, he was calling his hearers to have a kingdom mindset that affected everything they thought and did.

Imagine, husbands and fathers, what would your home be like if you came home from work one day and announced to your family, “This home is God’s kingdom. In this house, we will follow God’s Word and obey God’s principles. In this home we will honor and glorify His name.” If you did that, your wife might faint and your children might think to call 911!

What would it be like if you went to work tomorrow morning and announced (at least to yourself if not also to your co-workers), “My job falls within the realm of God’s kingdom. I will work in such a way that His name is honored and glorified.” Would such an attitude and announcement affect your work; the quality of your work?

Now, imagine this; what would happen to a congregation where all the people showed up declaring, “This is God’s kingdom. We will follow His Word and obey His principles; we will honor Him in what we say, the way we sing, and the way we serve one another.” You think this too much; overboard; too extreme. If we follow the example of Paul, notice that he ***“welcomed”*** people (a word that means to gladly take in; to receive and accept other to yourself) – Paul ***“welcomed”*** people into his rented quarters, and every indication of the text is that they were not there but a few moments before they realized they were not just in some prisoner’s cell but that they were in fact in the realm of God’s kingdom; sitting with a spokesman of that kingdom. Will you resolve to be more thoughtful and then outspoken concerning this truth; we are in and we are looking forward to the fullness of God’s kingdom. Let that truth begin to affect how you think, what you say and what you do. But there is an additional truth that Paul communicated.

B. The truth about the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is interesting to me that when reading Paul’s sermons and letters; you find that he rarely referred to Jesus as simply Jesus. More often than not Paul attached powerful appositives to that name. An appositive is a noun or noun phrase that renames another noun right beside it. An *appositive* can be a short or long combination of words. For Paul, included with the name of

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

Jesus were nouns like Lord or Christ or even both at the same time. And so, in Romans 1:7 we find Paul saying to the Church at Rome, **“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** The noun **“Lord,”** or **“kurios”** in the Greek, simply means, “master; ruler; sovereign”. Throughout the New Testament, **“Lord”** is used to describe a number of things; such as, “the Lord’s day,” and “the Lord’s table”.

In the very first sermon of the newly started Church, Peter, in Acts 2:21 defined salvation as relating to the fact that Jesus was Lord (master, ruler; sovereign). Peter preached there, **“And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”** The use of **“Lord”** by the Christians was significant for the word had been adopted by the Caesars and all the citizens of the Roman Empire were expected to offer a pinch of incense every morning to the Roman Emperor and utter these words, “Kaisar (kah’-ee-sar) Kurios” or, in English, “Caesar is Lord.” This means that the content of Paul’s message was politically incorrect and would lead to his death. But for Paul, the message was clear; the only Lord is the Lord Jesus; the only Sovereign, the only Ruler is Jesus.

Now let us consider the name Jesus, or **“Iesous”** in the Greek. This was actually a very common Jewish name given to thousands of Jewish males. However, it was given a special significance when it was given to our Lord. “Jesus” is the Greek translation of the Hebrew name **“Joshua,”** and means, “deliverer; or savior”. And then Paul uses one more noun; **“Christ,”** or **“Christos,”** which is simply the Greek translation of the Hebrew title “Messiah” – a word that means “anointed or specially chosen one.” Peter, by inspiration of God the Father, said in Matthew 16:16, **“... You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** So, when Paul preached the truth concerning Jesus, he was proclaiming Jesus to be the Sovereign and Master Ruler; Savior and Specially Chosen One of God. When we share Jesus with others, we need to give more than just His name, “Jesus” but include the significant characteristics and qualities of Jesus, most especially that He is Master, Savior and Chosen of God.

The content of Paul’s message; the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. May we be resolved to include nothing less than Paul when we talk to others about Christ. But there is more.

II. The Confinement of Paul’s Final Movements

As we come to the end of Acts, there is actually a lot that is left unsaid. The book ends abruptly. But, if combine what we learn about Paul from his other letters along with what we know from history, we can piece together facts that Luke does not tell us here. I need you to remember that Luke’s purpose in writing Acts was not to give us the biography of Paul, which is why we are left hanging with what happens next. Rather, Luke’s purpose in Acts was to give us the biography of the early church and the work of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of the apostles. However, because it is helpful for us, let me relate to you the final eight or nine years of Paul’s life from this point until his death in 68 AD. Here is a time line of Paul’s final years on earth:

- A.D. 59 – two years of house arrest;
- A.D. 61 – release and further missionary travel;
- A.D. 64 – Nero burns Rome;
- A.D. 64 – re-arrest in Corinth and return to Rome;
- A.D. 65 – confinement at Mamertine Prison;
- A.D. 68 – execution on the Ostian Way.

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

As you can see here, Paul's two years of house arrest ended. Some believe there was a statute of limitations in Roman law that Paul could not be held for more than two years if his accusers did not press charges. It would seem that no one had come from Jerusalem to accuse Paul, and so, after the two year period, he was set free. Did Paul see Nero Caesar? Did he ever testify before Nero? We are not told here but we have every reason to believe he did because of what the Lord told Paul, in Acts 27:24, “. . . **you must stand before Caesar . . .**” Writing in the third century, Eusebius, a Roman historian and Christian, states that Paul made two defenses before Nero and was released after his first defense. Eusebius used 2 Timothy 4:16-17a, as evidence, where Paul wrote, **“At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me . . .**” So, Paul either stood before Nero during this two year house arrest or later, when he was arrested again. We do know that after his release, Paul went on more missionary journeys.

- In his letter to Philemon, Paul intimates that he visited Colossae.
- In 1 Timothy 1:3, Paul makes reference to visits to Macedonia and Ephesus.
- In Titus 3:12, Paul mentions a visit to Nicopolis.
- In 2 Timothy 4:13, he mentions Troas.

It is clear that after Paul was released, he traveled for several more years preaching the gospel. It was during these years that Nero degenerated into a narcissistic madman and set Rome on fire, destroying half of the capital city. Tacitus, a Roman historian who lived at the time of Paul, wrote of Nero's attempt to divert public suspicion of himself onto some other scapegoat. I wonder who Nero might blame for the fire that destroyed half the city? Tacitus wrote:

“Wherefore in order to stop the rumor, Nero put forward as guilty, and afflicted with the most exquisite punishments those who were hated for their abominations and called “Christians” by the populace. . . . Therefore first of all those who confessed to being Christians were arrested, and then as a result of their information, a large number were implicated, not so much on the charge [of burning Rome] as for hatred of the human race. They died by methods of mockery; some were covered with the skins of wild beasts and then torn by dogs, some were crucified, some were burned as torches to give light at night. . . . Men felt that their destruction was not on account of the public welfare but to gratify the cruelty of Nero.” (Annals, xv. 44).

Evidently Paul, being a leader of the Christian movement, was re-arrested while traveling, and brought back to Rome to stand trial. In 65-66 A.D. he was imprisoned in the infamous Mamertine Prison, which had the nickname, “The Rat's Nest”. According to tradition, the prison was constructed around 640-616 BC. It was originally created to be a cistern for a spring in the floor of the second lower level. Prisoners were lowered through an opening into the lower dungeon. It would be during this confinement that Paul would write his second letter to Timothy. Then, around 67-68 AD, Paul was beheaded on a road outside of Rome known as the Ostian Way.¹ Believers, please take note that whether imprisoned or free, Paul used every circumstance

¹ “The details are all wanting. Tradition supplies only a few, which may be true or not. The story is that Paul was beheaded on the Ostian Road. It was customary for criminals of prominence to be executed several miles out of the city so as to avoid the crowds. We may picture the event in a possible manner. One day in late spring or early June the executioners came to Paul's dungeon and led him out of the city. One is reminded of Jesus as he bore his cross along his Via Dolorosa. Paul, as a condemned criminal, would be the victim of the rabble's sport. He would have no

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

to proclaim the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Will you resolve to do the same? Before we close Acts, let me point out one more thing.

III. The Commitments of Paul Final Musings (and of all believers)

Here I will offer you two points of application as we look at Paul's final days and the commitments he reveals.

A. The most revealing times of a person's perspective of life are in times of great opposition.

The first application is this; we need to be reminded that the most revealing times of a person's perspective of life are in times of great opposition. Looking back to the very last verse of Acts 28, there in verse 31, note with me the final word. What is it? We read that Paul was, **“preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.”** What an unexpected word. What was Luke thinking by using the word “unhindered”? Paul was imprisoned! He was chained 24/7 to a Roman guard. “Unhindered”? This reveals to us something of both Paul and Luke's perspective of the gospel they preached. To them, the gospel was the power of God unto salvation and they believed it would make its way out as the sovereign Lord determined. For Paul and Luke, those rented quarters were simply the headquarters of a global missionary movement.

Paul had this same perspective back in 1 Corinthians 16:9, when he wrote, **“... a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”** Did you catch the conflict in this verse? How can you have a wide door...opened; free from adversity; and at the same time have many adversaries? How can you have both? Well, for Paul, one did not exclude the other! Where we get discouraged by difficulty and opposition thinking them as closing opportunities, Paul saw it differently. Paul would say, “Look at all the challenges and hurdles facing the church – what an open door of opportunity!” Yes, the most revealing times of a person's perspective of life are in times of great opposition. But there is more...

B. The most revealing times of what a person values are in times of great adversity.

Charles Spurgeon once noted, *“Trials teach us what we are; they dig up the soil, and let us see what we are made of.”* In other words, the most revealing times of what a person values are in times of adversity. And I would like to close the book of Acts and really the life of Paul by noting four things Paul clearly valued.

To do this, please turn in your Bible to 2 Timothy 4 where we find Paul's last words. Let me remind you that Paul wrote this letter while locked up in the Roman dungeon that was nicknamed “The Rat's Nest”. He ends this last letter with some very personal requests that reveal what Paul treasured most. Look with me at 2 Timothy 4:9-13 where we read,

defender. We do not know if Luke was with Paul to the very last. We may at least hope so. If he could, he would surely walk along as near Paul as would be allowed. But no band of Christians followed with him now. He was going out of Rome on his way to the true Eternal City. He knew Rome well, but his eyes were fixed on other things. Outside the city the busy, merry life of the time went on. The crowds flowed into town. Some were going out. Paul was only a criminal going to be beheaded. Few, if any, of the crowds about would know or care anything about him. At a good place on the road some miles out the executioners stopped. The block was laid down. Paul laid his head upon it. The sword (or axe) was raised. The head of the greatest preacher of the ages rolled upon the ground. Tradition says that a Roman 'matron' named Lucina buried the body of St. Paul on her own land, beside the Ostian Road.' Be that as it may, no Christian can come to Rome, especially by the Ostian Road, without tender thoughts of Paul, the matchless servant of Jesus." (A.T. Robertson, *Epochs In The Life Of Paul*, pp. 316-317).

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

“Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments.”

Note with me the four things which Paul valued.

1. Paul valued his friends

Paul's first personal request was deeply **emotional**. Paul said in effect, *“Timothy, I want to see you again, and please bring Mark with you, for only Luke is here . . .”* In other words, *“Bring my friends . . . I need them and I value them.”* The words verse 10 were painful, ***“Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me.”*** Then, in verses 16-17a he said, ***“At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me . . .”*** Shall we take issue with Paul and ask if whether or not the Lord is enough? I think Paul knew the Lord was enough and yet he goes on in verse 21a to say, ***“Make every effort to come before winter. . . .”*** Let me remind you that in the good times, our friends know who we are; but it is in the bad times that we know who our friends are. And Paul wanted the encouragement of his son in the faith to be with him as soon as he could come. Do you have friends that you value like this?

2. Paul valued needful, God-given possessions.

Paul's second request was **physical**. In verse 13a, *“. . . [Timothy] bring my cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus . . .”* Simply put, Paul was saying, “Timothy, I forgot my coat at Carpus’ house. Please bring it when you come.” Beloved, it is okay to value certain possessions, particularly needful one. I also find it encouraging to know that even the great apostle could be forgetful at times.

3. Paul valued learning

Paul's third request was **intellectual**. In verse 13b he said, *“. . . and [bring] the books . . .”* Based upon what we learn next, it is safe to say that these were secular, non-religious books, perhaps some history and some poetry. Why? Well, we know from Paul's sermon to the Athenians in Acts 17 how well versed he was in secular poetry. Paul wanted to keep learning so he could more effectively minister to unbelievers.

4. Paul valued Scripture

Paul's fourth, final, and most important request was **spiritual**. In verse 13c he said, *“. . . especially [bring] the parchments.”*

The **parchments** referred to the vellum or leather pieces upon which his copy of the Old Testament was written. Notice Paul wants this **“especially”** that is, most of all, he wants the scriptures. Charles Ryrie made some suggestions as to what Paul might have read over and over to encourage his heart; passages like; Isaiah 40:17, 23; ***17 All the nations are as nothing before Him, They are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaningless....23 He it is who reduces rulers to nothing, Who makes the judges of the earth meaningless.*** He might of also encouraged himself with Isaiah 26:3; ***“The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in You.”***

Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

The point is, while incarcerated there in the Mamertine Prison, Paul wanted to read God's word. How about you, do you want to read God's word in any and every circumstance?

As William Tyndale waited in the castle dungeon for his execution, he wrote the Governor of the castle this letter requesting much the same as Paul,

“I believe that you are not ignorant of what has been determined concerning me by the council; therefore, I entreat your lordship and that by the Lord Jesus, that if I am to remain here in prison during the winter, you will be kind enough to send me from my goods a warmer cap, for I suffer extremely from cold which is considerably increased in this cell. The procurator has a woolen shirt of mine, if he will be kind enough to send it. I wish also his permission to have a lamp in the evening; for it is wearisome to sit alone in the dark. But above all, I entreat and beseech you to kindly permit me to have my Hebrew Bible, Hebrew Grammar and Dictionary, that I may spend my time with that study. And in return, may you obtain your dearest wish, provided always it be consistent with the salvation of your soul. But if, before the end of winter, a different decision be reached concerning me, I shall be patient, abiding by the will of God to the glory of the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ, whose spirit, I pray, may ever direct your heart. Amen. W. Tyndale”

If you had only days to live, for what would you ask? What would comfort your soul? Could you be comforted at all or would you rail against God as you sat in the dark. Or would you draw nearer to the Lord Jesus Christ? After Paul had been in prison the second time for a few months, he was dragged from his dungeon cell and taken outside the city gates. There, by order of Nero, he was beheaded with a Roman sword for preaching the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Hardly a crime against humanity but rather an expression of a love for humanity. Eusebius, the historian, records for us that Paul was taken one mile outside the city of Rome, and on that road called the Ostian Way, was told to kneel down. The sword was raised by the Roman soldier, and it flashed in the sunlight for a brief moment, and then came down . . . and the apostle of grace, the champion of Christ finished his race.

Paul was the one who said to all of us, in 1 Corinthians 15:58, ***Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.*** With the ink barely dry and a messenger carrying that last letter to Timothy, even as the sword came down, in those final words in 2 Timothy 4:7, Paul declared, ***I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*** Beloved, would you ask the Lord, that by the power of His grace at work in you, you would resolve to live the rest of your days promoting the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ? As we await the coming Kingdom of Jesus, let us be busy writing the unfinished chapter of Acts; Acts 29.

Soli Deo Gloria

Copyright © 2014 Edward K. Godfrey. This message is the sole property of the copyright holder and may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this message must contain the above copyright notice. This message may not be copied in part (except for small quotations used with citation of source), edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of the copyright holder. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Edward K. Godfrey, Pastor, Hope Community Bible Church, 1001 W. Walnut Suite 5a, Rogers, AR 72756.