

UNSTOPPABLE

GOD'S WORK
IN THE WORLD

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Lesson 26

villagebible.church/unstoppable

DEVOTIONAL

Giacomo Puccini was a great composer whose operas number among the world's favorites. Even after he was stricken with cancer in 1922, he was determined to write a final opera, "Turandot," which some consider his best. As his illness grew worse, his students implored him to rest and save his strength, but he persisted. At one point he remarked, "If I do not finish my music, my students will finish it."

In 1924, Puccini went to Brussels to be operated on, where he died two days after his surgery. His students did finish "Turandot," and in 1926 the premiere was held in Milan under the baton of Puccini's favorite student, Arturo Toscanini. All went brilliantly until they came to the point in the score where the teacher had been forced to put down his pen. Toscanini, his face wet with tears, stopped the production, put down his baton, turned to the audience and cried out, "Thus far the master wrote, but he died!"

After a few moments, his face now wreathed in smiles, Toscanini picked up his baton and cried out to the audience, "But his disciples finished his work!" They finished the opera.

The Book of Acts is the story of "all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day that He was taken up to heaven" (1:1, 2). The work that He began was to be completed by His disciples, who were to be His "witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (1:8). When we come to the end of Acts, Luke leaves us with the apostle Paul preaching the gospel in the capital of the empire, "with all openness, unhindered." And so, in one sense, the mission was accomplished, with the gospel going to the remotest part of the earth.

And yet in another sense, Luke leaves the story open and ongoing. Jesus' followers have been carrying on the mission for almost 2,000 years, but it is not yet thoroughly accomplished. We know that one day in heaven there will be some from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, whom Jesus purchased for God with His blood (Rev. 5:9). There have been encouraging advances in the cause of world missions in recent years. For example, the Jesus Film has been shown to about 5 billion people. A year ago, film project director, Paul Eshelman, estimated that 90 percent of the world, about 5.6 billion, could listen to the film in their native tongue (Mission Frontiers, [3/01], p. 39).

But as yet there are still close to two billion that have not heard of Jesus Christ. We have the privilege of joining the Lord in accomplishing His purpose of being glorified among all the nations! In that sense, the Book of Acts is still being written. Acts 28 shows us how God accomplishes His mission:

God accomplishes His Great Commission by protecting, providing for, and empowering His servants who obediently proclaim the gospel to all people.¹

¹ Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-71-mission-accomplished-acts-281-31>

OPEN IT

1. What is your greatest personal accomplishment? How were you able to achieve it? (It is okay to brag a bit; your group will cut you off if it goes too long.) 😊

READ IT

Acts 28:17-31

EXPLORE IT

2. Who did Paul meet with upon arriving in Rome?
3. What was their conclusion after examining Paul?
4. What did they desire of Paul?
5. What was the response to what Paul shared with them?
6. Why did some stand up and leave while Paul was talking?
7. What does Luke tell us about the last chapter of Paul's life?

APPLY IT

ROLL THE CREDITS

If you like complete closure and prefer happily-ever-after conclusions, then you might be disappointed with the ending of Acts. Luke has taken us for quite a journey. His writing is remarkable, but his ending might appear surprising and perhaps even a bit frustrating. We have been leading up to Paul's trial before Caesar for many chapters now, but nothing is said about it here! In fact, Acts closes without telling us what happened to Paul. We're not sure how long he lived. We don't know how long he was able to go on ministering unhindered. We can't even be certain he ever made it to Spain. Can you imagine reading a novel that ended like this? If you did, you might write the publisher to say, "Hey! I'm missing a chapter! I need to know what happened to Paul!" Acts essentially ends on a big "To be continued." Why? Because Luke didn't intend to write a biography of Paul.

Luke purposed to describe the acts of the Lord Jesus accomplished by the Spirit. He set out to describe the unstoppable progress of the gospel. His first book, the Gospel of Luke, set out to tell "all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up" (Acts 1: 1-2). The book of Acts, then, is about all that Jesus continued to do after that point. The ministry of Jesus continued by the Spirit through the church. Luke leaves us with Paul preaching the mighty gospel of the kingdom in Rome. And in choosing to walk away from the story here, Luke masterfully keeps the King—not Paul or anyone else—the hero of Acts. Luke concludes Acts on a note of victory, with the triumph of the King. This is a fitting conclusion.²

8. How would Hollywood have concluded the story of Acts on the big screen? What good comes from concluding as Luke did?

9. Read the last verses of the Gospel of Luke. Does it end in a similar way? What things are left out of the ending of Acts that might have been helpful to our study?

² Merida, Tony. *Exalting Jesus in Acts (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)* (Kindle Locations 8666-8678). Holman Reference. Kindle Edition.

COURT SUPERVISION

Still under free custody, he was granted considerable liberty, being allowed to live in his own rented house with only a single soldier to guard him (cf. v. 30). He was thus free to bear his witness; the subsequent narrative highlights this, but the presence of the soldier reminds us that it was a witness in chains.³

10. Paul's time in Rome was both good and bad filled with both freedom and bondage. This serves as a reminder that life rarely is one or the other but a combination of both. How is this true of your own life, and why are such ebbs and flows to life helpful to our faith?

11. In Acts 28:16, Paul is allowed to live by himself in Rome with one soldier. What hardships would come from such an arrangement and what good might come from it? (See Philippians 1:13)

12. Paul's situation (being able to work & yet in custody) speaks of those who were able to see into his public and private lives. What would be said of you by others if you were in Paul's shoes?

³ Polhill, John B.. Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: 26 (The New American Commentary) (p. 537). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition

DEALING WITH THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Paul's first action, once he is settled in to his new abode, is to summon the leaders of the Jews in Rome. We have insufficient information about the Jewish community in Rome to know precisely which officials are envisaged here. Paul invites them to come to him, since he is apparently not able to visit them; his situation is one of house arrest. He informs them of the reasons that have brought him to Rome.⁴

13. Paul took a risk and invited the local Jewish leaders to his house in Rome. In what ways could this be viewed as both an unwise and a wise decision? What practical truth can we learn from this risky move in our own lives?

14. The leaders Paul met with seemed to be unaware of Paul or the trouble he had caused the Jews throughout Asia, Macedonia and Judea. How might the events of Acts 27 have helped in this situation? What key lesson can we learn if this is indeed the case?

Paul was concerned for the welfare of his fellow Jews and therefore he was concerned about his integrity. That is, he wanted to make sure that they would be able to hear him. This defense was not born of personal interest. His greatest concern was that Jesus Christ would be believed upon by these Jews (Romans 9:1–5; 10:1–3). He wanted his fellow Jews to experience the promise made to their fathers. He wanted them to have the hope which they had been promised.⁵

15. Paul's message centered on the hope that the gospel brings to lost people. What hope does the gospel bring to believers and how do we know if we are living in light of it?

⁴ Marshall, I. Howard. Acts: 5 (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) (p. 442). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Sermon Excerpt by Doug Van Meter found @ <http://brackenhurstbaptist.co.za/the-end-of-the-beginning/>

PREACH IT, BROTHER!!!

Luke's summary of this long sermon is tantalizingly brief: "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" (Acts 28:23). But it is hugely instructive: Paul's message was essentially about "Jesus" and "the kingdom of God." Luke is himself preaching to us in this summary, saying that the burden of Paul's preaching was Jesus. This last statement bears further examination, not least because it continues to have such a crucial impact on how the Bible should be proclaimed in our time.⁶

16. Luke speaks of no healings or miracles, only that Paul preached in Rome. What does this tell us about the power of God's Word and the limitations of the sign gifts (healings and miracles)?

Paul taught about Jesus in accordance with the Old Testament, showing Christ as the hero of the Scriptures. He magnified Jesus as the Messiah throughout his exposition, imitating the pattern set forth by Jesus on the Emmaus road (Luke 24: 27, 44-47). Likely influenced by this, Luke ends both his Gospel and Acts by highlighting the exposition of Scripture and the central figure in the Scriptures, Jesus. Here in Acts, Paul's main two subjects are the "kingdom of God" and "Jesus" (vv. 23, 31); they summarized the heart of Paul's instruction. We must continue the church's mission by continuing to expound the Scriptures and pointing people to the hero of the Scriptures!⁷

17. Much of contemporary preaching revolves around the human experience and topics that both fascinate and intrigue us. How does this PREACHING fall short of Paul's example of preaching the scriptures with Christ, not us, as the subject?

18. Paul speaks about the kingdom of God. What is this kingdom and how are we to engage the "kingdom" here on earth as Jesus says in Matthew 6:10?

⁶ Thomas, Derek W. H.. Acts (Reformed Expository Commentaries) (pp. 731-732). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

⁷ Merida, Tony. Exalting Jesus in Acts (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (Kindle Locations 8763-8769). Holman Reference. Kindle Edition.

IT IS TIME TO DECIDE

Paul was “persuading them concerning Jesus.” This is what the gospel is all about: It’s all about Jesus (Romans 1:1–4). This was Paul’s passion and it is the passion of all who are properly committed to Acts 1:8. Everything that characterized Paul’s life and ministry—his preaching, passion, purpose, perseverance, politeness—was about Jesus.

The result of Paul’s ministry, as always, was that “some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.” This latter phrase literally means that some refused to believe. But the apostle remained faithful (see 1 Corinthians 4:1–2). He continued to passionately proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ because he wanted to see people saved.⁸

19. Read Isaiah’s words in Acts 28:26-28. What does this passage say about the people God is calling us to share the gospel with? In light of this description, what should our strategy and approach with them be?

Luke’s description of Paul preaching “with boldness” and “without hindrance” symbolizes a wide open door, through which we in our day have to pass. The Acts of the apostles have long ago finished. But the acts of the followers of Jesus will continue until the end of the world, and their words will spread to the ends of the earth.⁹

20. We too live in a time and place where we can preach without hindrance, and yet sadly we lack the boldness to do it. What keeps you from being bold, and to whom can you step out in faith to boldly proclaim Christ this week?

⁸ Sermon Excerpt by Doug Van Meter found @ <http://brackenhurstbaptist.co.za/the-end-of-the-beginning/>

⁹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990),

Note: This study was compiled, and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. www.villagebible.church/smallgroups