

THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

Acts 28:17-31

Just a little background here...

Paul is in prison – and yet not really in prison at this point. It's a house prison, with a guard – but people can come and go and have conversations with him. He gets meals, water...fresh air – and so “prisoner” while true it's probably a pretty decent gig considering the alternative. And he's here because he's made claims that his Jewish brothers and sisters do not like – so much so they want him dead. And Rome doesn't know quite what to do with him...so they keep him in prison for his own safety, to appease the Jewish leaders and keep a somewhat peace...but none of this is keeping him quiet. In one sense he still wants to clear his name because he hasn't done anything wrong but on the other hand he wants to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. He wants to share his faith and his hope – a hope they all knew quite well and yet were ignoring. And so he calls them to him. It's kind of a welcome and “I am here...I know you know who I am” and then asks to have a meeting with the local Jewish people.

Read Acts 28:17-31

Before I was in ministry I was in sales. Right after college I used my sales experience and worked for a telecom company that sold telephone service to businesses...and I was good at it. And before that, just out of HS and into college, I sold Cutco cutlery...and I was REALLY good at that – in fact I worked my way up at Cutco quite quickly. And my success with both of these very different and yet similar companies came not only because I like to talk and I love people – but my success really came from my ability to observe my surroundings and find relatable and common ground and interests. For selling knives, I love to cook, and so I would ask if I could come around dinner prep time and based off what they were cooking that evening I would ask if I could help provide some food for their meal – and the only request I had of them was that they use my knives to prepare their meal. It worked really really well. And with phone service it simply was looking at pictures and other things on the wall and being able to relate to the decision maker's passions and joys. Finding common relatable space.

This wasn't a scam at all – it was simply me being able to build a bridge so we could talk. So they could hear me out. So they could understand our commonality of desires, hopes, and other things in life. Paul is building a bridge of common hope here – the hope of Israel. THAT, right there...is his message to the Jewish people. That's the message that

got him the death sentence by the Jewish Leaders, that's the message that the Romans couldn't figure out why he was to be killed for...that's everything to Paul.

Paul simply wants to share *hope*. And not only his hope but THE hope. But before he can do that...before he can have that conversation – and it's the conversation that got him here in the first place – Paul's first order of business is to tie these Jewish leaders and their body of believers *to* him. He wants and needs them to understand that *their* hope is the same as his...it's just that he believes that their mutual hope has already come. But he's got to get there first. And he's not going to do it Mary Poppins style, with a little sugar with the medicine, Paul NEVER resorts to that...Paul is relational – that's his gift – so he's going to do it in the way that he knows works, and the way that holds the gospel truth without watering it down or sugar-coating it up.

This “hope for Israel” is nothing new to the Jewish people – nor to Paul. He uses it a number of times in different capacities and meanings – but all of it surrounding the simple fact that “hope” was in the resurrection of the dead, the fulfillment of the promises seen in the Old Testament and given TO Israel (**Acts 23:6; 24:15; 26:6-7**)... but that hope was also tied up in the simple fact that they were not a free people. They were still under Roman occupation. The “Roman Yoke” was still strapped to their necks and occupied all of their thoughts.

To the Jews...the “hope of Israel” WAS THE MESSIAH...was, and is, a liberator, savior, high priest and king. A man who would come from the line of David and rule the Jewish people...to us that is abundantly and blatantly clear. To Paul he would stand with us on that as well. Everything the Jewish people looked for pointed to Jesus Christ of Nazareth. He fit all those profiles – and yet...he didn't for many.

And this is the second part of Paul's message. The fact that Isaiah prophesied of this blindness to the Messiah that would fall on many of the Jewish people (**Isa 6:9-10**). And that's in fact what happens. To the crowd that comes to hear his words, many hear but never understand. Many see but never perceive. Their ears don't hear, their eyes are closed, and their hearts are turned and not healed. And you have to wonder why!? It's so blatantly clear that Christ fulfills this hope! And it's not like Paul doesn't try – maybe that's why he throws out that Isaiah text...he's so frustrated!

We read in verse 23 that the Jewish leaders arranged for Paul to speak to a massive group of Jewish people...and he witnessed to them from morning to evening. From the rising to

the setting sun Paul “witnesses” to all that are gathered. The word we get here in Greek means to “testify”. For a whole day...Paul lays out everything they knew, or thought they knew, and attempts to persuade all to see the hope as fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

I hear complaints from people when our worship service runs longer than an hour! People find their voice of complaints when the preacher goes longer than 25 mins...can you imagine being in the crowd that came to Paul to hear of his hope...for the whole day!?! People would rather have a root canal than that!

But Paul does. For the whole day he opens up scriptures, in which they already knew, and pours out how all of those pieces of scripture connect to Christ. And I think that’s one thing that draws us all so much to Paul. The fact that he is not only passionate, the fact that he not only is up and willing to do anything to spread the Gospel, but to do so in a passionate and relatable way. That’s why we love his letters so much! His passion, his truth, his unabashed words, his ability to tether people together, and the ability he has to open up scripture in a way that simply connects the dots.

But even Paul recognizes that his words are merely words. That ultimately it’s not what he says that turns people – that even with the best intentions and all the eloquence in the world it’s not up to him to know where the truth of Christ hits each person...it’s the Holy Spirit’s. Just as the Holy Spirit moved through Isaiah (**Is 28:26-27**) to speak the truth of what people will and will not hear back *then* – that truth still holds truth to Paul and to you and I today. And this is something that I really struggle with – but it’s also a place that I find grace in as well. I want people to know Jesus. I want people to find hope and comfort and beauty and truth in the Gospels. I want my Islamic, Buddhist, Jehovah Witnesses, Baha’i, Jewish, Scientology, Atheist, Agnostic and all other brothers and sisters to read, know, investigate, and come to the realization and truth of Jesus Christ. But there has to be a reality there that it is not ME that does the workings in the heart. Salvation and truth are not up to me and the words I say or do not say. And *that* is a tough reality for many of us.

But there is also a challenge with that knowledge – right? Because I think we can fall into the rut of NOT sharing the gospel. Knowing that it is not up to us but the Holy Spirit, we can find ourselves down the path of NOT doing anything. Sitting back and simply allowing God’s plan and will to be carried out by him...and that’s not right either. There’s a balance that must be found. There is a grace in-between here where there is the truth and knowledge of the work of the Spirit and the reality that He asks us to partake in

the sharing and spreading of the gospel. Understanding that regardless of my eloquence or failed grace to speak...salvation is ultimately not up to me. God simply asks me to speak, to love, to share, and teach and spread the news of Christ.

And as Paul does so often...we are to do so while in chains if need be.

I love how Paul, while in prison, preaches the freedom of Christ. That while under Roman guard Paul's "salvation" message of the chains and bondage being loosed by Christ...and being set free and saved are there...that's captivating! Hardened hearts will not stop him from sharing the message. People's misunderstanding and the ability for some to simply NOT understand will not stop the message from moving forward. Neither chains nor bondage will keep Paul from speaking from his heart – and ultimately, there is nothing that will dampen the work of the Holy Spirit to proclaim, speak, move, compel, and share the love of God and the work of the Son.

It's this combination of the work of God with the passion of the message bringer that simply does something. It's a message that comes out clearly throughout Paul's letters. He writes in **Rom 10:1**, "Dear brothers and sisters, the longing of my heart and my prayer to God is for the people of Israel to be saved." Good and challenging words for you and I. To allow the joy and longing and passion of your heart – the love of your God...to come out. And not only come out but passionately come out for SOMEONE ELSE. For them to know what real and true hope looks like.

Paul wouldn't be able to talk about the hope of Israel if he didn't have the love for Israel first. Paul wouldn't be able to share his hope of Christ if he didn't have a love for Christ first. Paul's love, honesty, and truth comes from a place of longing for both Jews and Gentiles, believers and non...to hear, know, respond, and come to believe in the hope and grace of Jesus Christ.

I think a lot of times we find fear in conversations with people about *our* hope. We feel it won't be accepted, it won't be received correctly, we're unsure just how to go about it or the failed words we often find at the tips of our tongues... or there's the simple fact that "religion" is right up there with politics as the #1 and #2 things you simply don't talk to people about – that is, unless you're looking for a fight. We even have families that don't talk about those things with each other...and yet...there is only 1 thing in this life that gives us hope: Jesus Christ. Knowing that in his death and life we are given death and

life. Our hope is built on the foundation of truth and grace of Jesus ...and yet we have a fear of what sharing that looks like? How is that possible?

Paul's hope is the same as our hope – and yet Paul's conviction and dedication to that hope doesn't always seem to be where we land. We appreciate it, we're moved by it – but how many of us sit there and say, "*If Paul can do this while in prison...then I can go talk to this person.*" It doesn't happen. And that's OK – it's not supposed to. Paul's letter's and his work as told by Luke in Acts aren't here for us to be held up as mirrors to what he has done – they're here to be encouragers... they're here to offer hope, to see hope, to proclaim hope. And not just hope for you and I to know within our souls...but hope that is to be shared with others. This isn't about Paul...it's about Christ. It's not about you...it's about Christ. It's about knowing you're your gifts, your passions – and using them to share the gospel. It's about knowing the truth to our core and wanting to share that with someone and then actually doing it!? And then being unafraid, unabashed, unfiltered *in that* love, hope, and grace! Being able to say, "*Let me talk to you about my hope.*" But we must also take a page from Paul and so many others in how they share hope – by finding a common strand between you – whatever it is.

Paul's living out the great commission (**Matthew 28:19-20**). You and I are to live out the great commission too. By engaging, by finding common ground, by loving and serving and sharing and being unafraid of your hope in Christ and declaring it... even while at home, even while at play, even while at work...even while in prison.

The hope of Israel is the hope of the world as given to us by God that we get to live into each and every day. The hope of you and I is in a God of love and grace who sent his Son to redeem and give life-everlasting to those who believe, live, affirm, and drink of this hope realized. The hope of the world, even though many do not know it, is that Jesus Christ placed himself between you and eternal damnation... what more could we ever want to share? People need to know that hope. As Paul declares in his closing words that salvation has gone out to the gentiles – the realization is that is everyone who is not Jewish. Which means that the good news that you hold and know, that *hope* you have...knows no bounds or borders and must be given to every heart. It means that God's love isn't narrow or boxed in. It means that his salvation and grace is bigger than you and me and is there for everyone. That's hope. That's the hope of the world.

And you and I...are simply asked to share that hope every day. Wherever you find yourself...share your hope.

