

Acts Chapter 28

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- [0 : 0 0] We are closing out the Acts of the Apostles. I don't recall exactly when it was we began this. Somebody made a note of it, but it has taken longer than what we anticipated.
- But we have actually arrived at chapter 28. And I want you to be reminded that as the book closes out, the Apostle Paul remains under house arrest.
- First, he has been permitted by the Roman authorities to hire his own villa, a little condo, if you will. And on this particular day, the Apostle Paul has sent out word by way of invitation to the Jewish leaders there in the city of Rome, inviting them to come to him and hear from him what he has to say.
- He was a rabbi. He was trained at the feet of Gamaliel. He was very familiar thoroughly with the law of Moses, upheld it, taught it, lived by it, etc.
- And yet, when he was confronted by the living Christ on the road to Damascus, it completely changed everything. Because now he is seeking to proclaim the faith which once he sought to destroy.
- [1 : 2 2] It represents perhaps the most dramatic turnaround in all of Christian history. And it is still spoken of today in terms of a Damascus Road experience.
- It was an earth-shaking thing in the life of the Apostle Paul. And he has dedicated the remainder of his life to proclaiming that gospel. Eventually, it caused him to be arrested.
- Now he is in Roman custody. Now these Jewish people, these Jewish leaders in Rome are coming to him. And we read, I am on page 642, that when they came to him in verse 23, they had appointed him a day, and there came many to him into his lodging, to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.
- And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And verse 25 says, And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed.
- And that simply indicates that they were not able to reach a consensus. There was still a lot of division among these people. We don't know if they numbered 12, or if they numbered 30 or 40.
- [2 : 5 2] We have no idea. We're just told that many came. However, when Paul explained who Jesus was, and what he did, and Israel's responsibility for their crucifixion, some of them believed the message that Paul gave.
- Some of them were sitting there, and as Paul was saying, they were connecting the dots mentally. And they were saying, You know what? I think this guy's got something here. This makes a lot of sense.
- And he reasoned to them from the scriptures. We are told both out of the law of Moses, and from the prophets. And Paul was setting forth the person of Christ, as he was prophesied in the Old Testament, hundreds of years before he came.
- And indicating how the things that happened to Christ, are the very same things that were prophesied. Now, somebody has done the math on this, and I forget exactly what the numbers are, but they are absolutely staggering.

Seems to me that his name was Dr. Peter Stoner. He was a mathematician. And he explored the mathematical probability of the person of Jesus Christ being able to fulfill just 12 of the numerous prophecies that were given regarding him.

[4 : 12] of being able to fulfill 12 of those prophecies in detail as he did. The mathematical probability of anyone being able to do that just coincidentally is a number that you can't even pronounce.

Something to the 20th power or whatever. So, just from a mathematical probability standpoint, there is solid, convincing evidence that Jesus Christ is who he said he was, and that he did what the Bible says he did, and that the significance of it is recorded right there as well.

So, there are some pretty powerful things, and I don't know to what extent Paul was able to share all of these with him, but some of these people were convinced, and some were not convinced. And we've got three different areas here.

Each of them, I think, is referred to either directly or indirectly in the epistle of the Hebrews in that as regards the Jews in the first century, regarding the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, there were some Jews who believed it and bought the whole thing.

They didn't have any doubt about it. It made sense to them, and they accepted it as fact. These were the believers. These were the twelve apostles to start with, and then the number, of course, grew.

[5 : 32] And then there was another group who, upon hearing the evidence regarding Jesus of Nazareth, they were on the fence. They couldn't make up their mind.

Today, they think it makes sense, and they are prepared to believe it, but tomorrow? No, that can't be. That can't be right. And they were wavering, and Hebrews addresses them.

And then there were the hardcore unbelievers who were just not going to believe, period. I think all three of those groups, even though they are not identified as such, are probably in this group of people here who some believe, and some believe not, and some were on the fence, and they were just arguing back and forth.

And, fellas, I want you to try to put yourself in the position of these people, because it's easy for us to just read about them and say, well, they should have believed. But you've got to understand where these people were coming from.

They have been engaged in a full-blown belief and practice of tradition, of theology as they understood it, of Moses and the prophets as they understood them, as they had heard it proclaimed, and as they themselves had proclaimed it for years and years and years.

[6 : 52] And what we're talking about here is perhaps the most difficult thing that a person has to do in order to come to faith in Jesus Christ.

And I always refer to this as the hard part of the gospel. It is. We talk about the gospel being simple. All you have to do is believe. Yeah, well, that sounds easy to say.

But the first thing you have to do before you can believe is you have to repent. That means you have to change your position. You've got to reverse yourself.

And, fellas, we do not do this easily. I am convinced that this is the main reason. This is the main reason why it is so much easier to lead a child to Christ than it is an 80-year-old man.

Because whenever anyone comes to faith, you've got to change your mind. Because whatever you believed before you came to faith in Christ, whatever you believed about salvation and connecting with God, it was wrong.

[8 : 08] It was wrong. It wasn't true. You've got to reverse that. And that's not easy to do. Now, if you are a six- or eight-year-old child, you don't have a lot of history to unlearn.

Six- and eight-year-olds aren't set in their ways. They're malleable. Yes, and they can be gullible. If you tell a six-year-old and you're a position of authority and someone that they trust, you tell them that the moon is made of green cheese, they'll believe you.

They'll believe you. Because they have an innocence about them. But when somebody is older, we do tend to get set in our ways.

There's no question about it. And it's a lot more difficult for us to unlearn something than it is to learn it. And before you can turn yourself around, you have to stop.

You've got to turn your back on what you have believed and embrace this new thing that is not easily done. That's why I call it the hard part of the Gospel.

[9 : 19] The hard part of the Gospel is repenting. It is being able to admit, this is what I have always believed about these things. And you know what? I've been wrong all along.

Now tell me, how does that make you feel? It makes you feel pretty rotten. It might even make you feel kind of stupid. How did I miss it all these years? How is it that I couldn't see that?

Why did I believe that? How did I go along with that? And these are natural reactions because we are conflicted in our mind. This is something that we have embraced all this time.

And then to find out that you were wrong all along is a bitter pill to swallow. I'm circulating a book by Nabil Qureshi.

Name probably doesn't mean a thing to you, but he is one incredible individual. Nabil Qureshi was born and raised in a strict, solid Muslim family with all the accoutrements that you would expect in a Muslim family.

[10 : 27] And the title of his book is Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus. He wasn't seeking Jesus.

He was seeking Allah. And he found Jesus. And Nabil Qureshi, when he came to faith, and by the way, he's a man of science and medicine.

He's a medical doctor. And he is on the team now with Rabbi Zacharias, presenting the claims of the gospel in an apologetic fashion. I've heard him speak on a couple of occasions.

And he's really significant. Very significant. And he talked about the heartache and the difficulty of turning his back on Islam and his Islamic family because he had very loving, close relationships with his family.

Mother, father, and siblings. And when he came to faith in Christ and embraced Christianity, it was cataclysmic in that family.

[11 : 34] I mean, these people were all heartbroken, emotionally heartbroken. This was their beloved son who had, in their estimation, turned his back on their faith.

And he was, in essence, saying, Mom, Dad, I love you. But you're wrong. And you raised me wrong. And you taught me to believe wrong. You think that isn't a bitter pill to swallow?

And there are people who have come to see the truth of Christianity and yet just they have emotional ties and they just are conflicted inwardly.

That's what some of these people were going through. These Jewish people. What is this going to mean? What is this going to mean if I come over to this Jesus being the Messiah? Wow.

And even before the crucifixion. Back in the Gospel of John, I think it was, yeah, it was in chapter 9, regarding the man born blind and the miracle of Christ performing, giving sight to the man born blind.

[12 : 38] There was already tremendous controversy afloat regarding whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. And some of the people, especially his apostles, were of course saying that he was and they were preaching that.

And the Jews had already come to a conclusion, this is the leadership, had already come to a conclusion that if anyone, if any Jew, believed and said that Jesus was the Messiah, he should be put out of the synagogue.

That means excommunicated. And in the first century, if you took a Jew out of a synagogue, it was a social death sentence, it was an educational death sentence, your children couldn't go to the synagogue anymore, that's where the school was, that's where the society was, that's where learning was, that's where fellowship was, that's where everything was.

That's where community was in the synagogue. And if you embrace Jesus as the Messiah, you're getting kicked out. You're going to be isolated, marginalized, shunned, avoided, ignored, everything.

So there was a price to pay. And you know it is the same today. You know what happens if somebody embraces Christianity from the Islamic faith, sometimes there is a fatwa put out on them, and that simply means that any Muslim is free to kill that person.

[14 : 14] I mean murder them, kill them, because they have turned their back on Allah and Islam, and they are worthy of a sentence of death. All of these things come into play, and this is what makes repentance hard, because people mentally program all of the ramifications.

What if I do this? What if I take this step? What if I receive Christ as my Savior? What kind of a price is there going to be to pay? And depending on where you live and the climate regarding spiritual things and Christianity, there may be a tremendous price to pay.

It may cost you your life, depending on who you are and where you are. So all of these things come into play when someone is considering making a quantum leap like this.

So you can understand they are not agreeing among themselves. They departed. I can see them now as they are walking away. They are still arguing among themselves, talking back and forth as they are walking away from Paul, headed for the street there in Rome.

They departed. After that, Paul had spoken and Paul said, tell us just a second, wait a minute, before you go, I have got one parting thing I want to say to you.

[15 : 30] Please hear me. After that, Paul had spoken one word and here is the word on page 644.

Well spoke the Holy Ghost. Let me translate that for you in a little modern for accurately. The Holy Spirit really knew what he was saying when he said this.

By Isaiah the prophet unto our fathers. When did Isaiah prophesy? About six or seven hundred years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

So, there is already in place a track record on behalf of Israel for unbelief and for rejection of the truth because they rejected Isaiah when he preached 700 years before Christ was born.

They rejected Jeremiah's truth when he preached 500 years before Christ was born. And so on. And now he says, here is what Isaiah, we've got just a little different spelling here in the King James, you can see the spelling is different.

[16 : 44] Here is what Isaiah said unto our fathers, that is their ancestors, saying, go unto this people and say, what people?

The Jew and only the Jew, not talking about Gentiles, English or French or anything else, talking about Jews, and say to them, hearing, you shall hear, oh, you've got ears, all right, you hear, and shall not understand.

understand. You shall in no wise understand, without ever understanding, not catch the meaning, and seeing, oh, you shall see, you will watch and watch, you will see with your eyes, you see physically, nothing wrong, you've got 20-20 sight, you keep on seeing that way, but you are not perceiving, for the heart of this people is waxed, gross, become dense, become fat, dense, callous, obtuse.

Maybe this is where the expression fathead has come from. We all have a little fatness in our heads, don't we? We all have a slow learning element, and I think that's exactly what he's talking about here.

This people's soul has grown dull, is hardened. The hearts of this people have lost their feeling. This is an expression that Paul uses when he writes to Timothy and he talks about some in unbelief have a seared conscience.

[18 : 37] And the word for seared there in the Greek is our word, is our English word cauterized.

Cauterized. And the cauterization of tissue that we might utilize to seal a wound if someone is bleeding profusely, sometimes they would apply a hot iron to the wound to stop the flow of blood and to cauterize the skin and you literally burn the skin and close over the wound with the heat.

And it creates scar tissue there when it heals. And the nature of scar tissue is it has no nerve endings in it.

It has no pain sensors in it. Scar tissue doesn't feel anything like your normal skin does. It has no feeling in it. And this is the term that Paul uses when he writes of those in unbelief.

They have a seared conscience. You can't get through to these people. The door is not only shut, it is bolted shut.

[19 : 55] And this is the expression of a hard heart. And it has nothing to do with feelings and emotions. We tend to think of a hard-hearted person as somebody who doesn't have any sympathy or compassion.

And that's one way of using the word in our terminology. But when the Bible talks about a hardened heart, it talks about a mind. It uses the word heart as a synonym for mind.

It means the mind is made up and will not be changed come hell or high water. I don't care what your evidence is.

I don't care what your proof is. Like someone said, don't confuse me with the facts. My mind is already made up. How do you get through to people like that? Very often you can't.

And that's exactly what Paul is saying to these. Their ears are dull of hearing. And again, Paul writing to Timothy said, the time is coming when they will not endure sound doctrine.

[21 : 02] Preach the word, take advantage of every opportunity, because the time is coming when people will not endure sound doctrine, but they will heap to themselves teachers having itching ears.

And that's kind of confusing in the King James, but it means they will not listen to the truth, they will not abide by the truth, they will not accept any truth as absolute, but they will search out teachers who will tickle their ears, and who, you know when you have a scratch, when you have an itch, you just have to scratch it.

And there are people who have an itch to hear what they want to hear. Not what they ought to hear, but what they want to hear. I call this just feel-good theology.

Just leave them feeling good. And there's a lot of this going on where people go to church and they're given a message that makes them feel good, warm and fuzzy.

The problem is by the time you get to the parking lot, it's gone. You need something to sustain you. You need truth. And that's what Paul is talking about here.

[22 : 16] And their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed. This is willingly shutting oneself up to the truth.

And their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

And the I, of course, is referring to God who is speaking through the prophet Isaiah. This is the process that is involved. And it is a remarkable thing for a person to be so teachable and open.

And guys, there is a world of difference between being gullible and being teachable. gullible. If you're gullible, you're a sucker for anybody's message.

You believe anything. One of my favorite sayings, P.T. Barnum, the famous circus master years ago, he had a ready-made audience because he said, there's a sucker born every minute.

[23 : 32] but in the religious world, there's a sucker born every 30 seconds. People can be so gullible. And part of it is the fact that we want to believe.

We want to believe something. We want to believe that somebody out there somewhere is in charge. You know, there's a security thing involved. And it can open us up to gullibility so we believe everything that comes down the pipe.

Again, if I may jump forward, when Paul wrote to Timothy, or was it? I don't remember. Sometimes these passages move around on me. They don't stay put.

But he talked about the necessity of believing and preaching the truth so that we are not carried about by every wind of doctrine.

Some people are ready for just anything new that comes down the pipe. And they latch on to it and they run without a while. And then something else new comes along and they jump to that. And they're always into something different.

[24 : 34] And that comes from not being stable and anchored in the truth so that we can grow in it. And that's the problem that Paul was confronting 2,000 years ago.

And it's the problem that Isaiah confronted 700 years before that. And it's the same problem that we confront today. because man and mankind has not really changed at all.

This is such a powerful thing. It requires the deliberate act of your volition to be able to say, you know what?

I've been wrong about this. It pains me to say that. God help me if I refuse to go with it.

That is a powerful thing. I've often said the most serious thing that a person can do is hear truth, understand it, and know it to be truth, and turn your back on it.

[25 : 46] There is no greater crime that we can commit than walking away from the truth like that. Truth really matters. Truth is that which corresponds to reality.

And when we are willing to acknowledge that, it requires a reversal. I don't know about you, but I don't like to be wrong.

about anything. And when I discover that I've got a little sign in my office, my wife insisted that I buy it and hang it in my office.

Real men don't ask for directions. How many times have I been lost? Boy, I don't know. It's become an art form with me to get lost like that.

And each time I do, I say, you know, I was positive that this was a right turn here. But it was a left turn.

[26 : 56] And I ended up going three or four miles, six miles out of my way. I did it again. You know, I did it again. How does that make me feel? Stupid.

Wrong. Dumb. What's the matter with me anyway? It doesn't make me feel good. It just confirms once again that I don't have a sense of direction. And it is a humbling thing, guys.

I've used this in the Marriage on the Rock series about John Wayne in that movie, one of the westerns he was in. She wore a yellow ribbon. And one of his favorite sayings that came up a number of times in the movie was, never apologize.

apologize. It's a sign of weakness. And I'll tell you something, fellas, and many years of marriage taught me this. Apologizing is not a sign of weakness.

It's a sign of strength. Weak people never apologize about anything. Don't we all know somebody who has never been wrong about anything?

[28 : 04] Don't we know somebody who's never apologized to anybody about anything? And really, there's no strength in it. It's weakness. It's weakness.

It takes a big person to say, I am wrong and I have been wrong and I need to reverse myself and change my thinking.

That's what Paul was confronted with on the road to Damascus. I think that's why he spent three days and three nights not eating and not drinking. there in that house on the street called Straight.

I think the man was seated at a table like this behind a chair and I can just see him now. And he had his head in his hands and he's shaking his head and saying, I can't believe it.

I can't believe it. How can this be? He's talking about that bright light and meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus and how utterly, totally, completely, fully, wrong he had been.

[29 : 11] And he's sitting there mentally replaying this thing, eating his humble pie over and over again. I can't believe it. How did I miss it? How could I not see it?

And he replays the stoning of Stephen. And all of those elders, all of the Sanhedrin there, these are the men who were the shakers and movers in Israel.

And they were all coming down on Stephen and I was giving my amen to it. And how could all of those fellow Jews be wrong? I was wrong there.

I was wrong here. I was wrong there. I can just see him. I can't believe it. This is amazing. How did I miss it? Over and over and over. And I think that went on for three days and three nights. He was traumatized.

there's only one thing to do. Walk away from what you've always believed and embrace this new truth.

[30 : 10] It is true after all. I have been wrong. Wow. That is hard to do. Really hard to do. Joe. I think in my life for example when I'm asking forgiveness more and telling I'm wrong, you know, I didn't do right and so forth, I think I'm living closer to God because my nature is sin and I'm going to do wrong constantly.

Every day there's going to be things that I'm not doing right or not doing good, not doing proper. So I'm going to have to be apologizing or asking forgiveness for all those things because of my sinful nature. And if I'm not doing that, I'm not admitting I have that sinful nature.

You're right. You're right. And fellas, this is why I say, as a Christian, you never outgrow your need for repentance. You never outgrow your need for acquiring truth and unlearning what you thought was true but now know isn't true.

And when we use that word repentance, it is so terribly misunderstood. So many think that it has to do with some kind of self-punishment or flagellation or you beat up on yourself or you deprive yourself of food and water or you fast or something like that, that you do penance, that you find some way to punish yourself.

And this is part and parcel of a lot of people's theology. I remember Barbara who was born and raised Roman Catholic. And she would say that they had to do penance of saying so many Hail Marys or Our Fathers or whatever.

[31 : 48] And that's supposed to be a form of self-punishment or inflicting or fasting like with Lent or something like that. And that's doing penance.

Well, that's not repentance. Repentance is a mental thing. It is a volitional thing. It is an act of the will. It comes about when you assess information and you discover that it contradicts what you've always believed.

Then you have to set up this conflict in your mind. Do you change or not? And by the way, nobody should do this easily or quickly because we're talking about really significant things here.

You should not repent quickly, especially about big, important items. You need to really examine the evidence. You need to consider the pros and cons.

You need to really think about it. We ought not to just change our mind willy-nilly, just like some silly dove flitting around. We need to be convinced of the evidence. We need to weigh it, evaluate it, and come to a conclusion.

[32 : 56] And if the conclusion requires that you change your mind, change your mind. Well, that's just one more thing that I've been wrong about all my life. And I've done that a number of times. And you know what?

After a while, you get used to it. And it's not so hard to change your mind. Someone said that's the best way to have a clean mind is you just keep changing it. Okay.

Any other thoughts or comments to food share? Dan? This last bit that Paul talked about, the impression I get is maybe a majority or at least a good number of people had a hard time buying what you're saying.

And you got a lot of objections throughout the day. Yeah. Yeah. I'm sure. Yeah. Absolutely. Good point. Roger? Oh, I think it was exclusively.

I think it was exclusively a Jewish audience. I don't have any doubt about that. But you know what? Guess who had to listen in even if he didn't want to? That Roman guard that was handcuffed to Paul.

[34 : 02] Here he is in the middle of it. All these Jews got around haranguing back and forth. And we don't know what he learned or what he picked up, but I tell you, you talk about a captive audience. He was a captive audience guard.

Wow. That must have been something. I tell you, I can't help but believe that some of those Roman guards that were handcuffed to Paul had to look back on it and say, you know what?

That's the best thing that ever happened to me. Best duty I ever had. And fellas, you're going to see them one day and they'll be able to tell you about themselves. Have a good day.