

Making a Lasting Impact

Acts 28

- This is the 29th week we have been studying this incredible book that Luke wrote and that God preserved for us
 - And as we come to a close on this study—I want to look at what it looks like To Make a Lasting Impact
- ***“After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. When the native people saw the creature hanging from his***

hand, they said to one another, “No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live.” He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.” -Acts 28:1-6 (ESV)

- Now, **MAP** as you can see the island of Malta is just south of Sicily...so you can see how God’s providence and blessings had allowed them to shipwreck on that island!
 - They had no idea where they were, they were only trying to go 30 miles west and stay on Crete...but through the storm, God had the winds push them almost all of the way to Italy.
 - And that is so important because later in the chapter, in a portion that we won’t have time

to read through today....when Paul gets to Rome and gathers the Jewish leaders together to appeal to them and get ahead of the battle that he is used to fighting with the Jewish leaders—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.”***
-Acts 28:21 (ESV)

- Do you know why they wouldn't have heard anything from Paul's accusers in Jerusalem yet? Because no one was traveling during those dangerous fall and winter months
 - So thanks to the storm blowing them all of the way to Malta, Paul got so much of a head start that even the letters that Paul's accusers would have sent to try and turn the Jewish leaders in Rome against Paul — wouldn't have gotten there before he did
 - So Paul gets the opportunity to share the Gospel, his situation, his heart without the

bias of his accusers clouding the mind of those he was speaking to

- But at the time they arrived on the shores of Malta, even the sailors didn't know where they were
 - But once they did realize where they were — they would have realized how fortunate they were, because Malta was an important island on the Mediterranean highway
 - Many Alexandrian Grain ships would regularly stop there, winter there, and get supplies there
 - Now, Malta was a series of three small islands, and they obviously didn't land at the main port, which the sailors would have recognized immediately—but they landed on one of the smaller beaches on the northern side of the island
 - And they didn't recognize where they were, but the Maltese people recognized them

- They are used to Grain Ships coming through—its the backbone of their economy
- So yes, they showed unusual kindness, but that was good for business
- But they do not know these Maltese people, they just refer to them as “Native people” which is the greek word “barbaroi” which is where we get the word “barbarian”
- And this didn’t mean that they were uncivilized...it just means that they didn’t speak Greek. And anyone that didn’t speak greek were referred to as barbarians in this day and age
- And as we see, there are not barbaric people at all, they are a kind and organized people
- So they help all 276 of the people from Paul’s shipwrecked boat..it was cold, it was raining —these people had just been pulled out of the cold sea—all of them soaking wet and cold already
- And again, verse 3 says: ***“When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand.” -Acts 28:3 (ESV)***
 - And you know what sticks out to me about this passage? It’s not the viper...no, its the fact that Paul is gathering sticks, Paul is helping build the fires
 - He’s just as cold and soaking wet as anyone else that was in that shipwreck...he has established his credibility as the man who hears from God that everyone should listen to and follow
 - Yet, he doesn’t sit around trying to just warm himself and waiting for people to serve him
- **WE MAKE A LASTING IMPACT: THROUGH SERVING**
 - There was no task that was too small for Paul...that’s what made Paul such a great leader

- I love the way Jesus talked about leadership, because He never used the word Lead, Leader, or Leadership...He always talked about it in the context of serving
 - *He says people will know you are My disciples if you love one another like I have loved you.*
 - *He says if you want to be great, you need to make yourself the least*
 - *He says if you want to be first you have to put yourself last*
- And He drove home the point— that so few of us understand anymore— and that is that leadership is not about obtaining a position, it's about serving others
- And Paul lived this out in such a way that he was able to confidently write: ***“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the***

interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...” -Philippians 2:3-5 (ESV)

- Jesus gives us this mind when we are made new in Him
- One of the greatest ways that Jesus showed this principle is when He took the time, before the last supper to go around, one by one, and washed His disciples feet.
 - The Lord, the Master, God in flesh—took the form of a servant, and afterward, He said: ***“Do you understand what I was doing? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I Am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you.” -John 13:12-15 (NLT)***

- Now, I am not of the camp that believes that Jesus is instructing us to have foot washings be a regular part of our services
 - I have heard of people being a part of foot washing ceremonies and had some powerful testimonies and stories...I'm not knocking, I'm just saying my wife Rachel would probably leave our church if she was asked to touch someone else's feet...
 - I don't think foot washing was the point— I think the point was about serving each other, taking care of one another, being willing to count others more significant than yourself
- What blows my mind about this more than anything else. In verse 11 it says that HE KNEW Judas was going to betray Him in just a few short moments.
 - Jesus knew EVERYTHING that was about to happen to Him. He knew Judas was gonna betray Him, Peter would deny Him, the disciples would scatter and leave Him...and yet He served them
- John 13:1 —says that He LOVED them to the very end
 - Jesus was so much less concerned about what they could do for Him, and more focused on who He could BE for them.
- What if we could get to the point where we served out of the sheer love for others?
 - Not thinking about how it might benefit us or what we might get out of it, or the recognition we should get from it, but just unconditionally loving and serving others like Jesus did.
 - How can we get to that place?
 - Well verse 3 tells us where Jesus' motivation for serving came from.
 - It says, ***“Jesus knew that the Father had given Him authority over everything and that He had come from God and would return to God. So He got up from the table...” -John 13:3-4a***

- Here's something to remember, **"The more secure you are in your Heavenly position, the less insecure you will be in your earthly position."**
- Think about it, why are we so hesitant to take the form of a servant like Jesus did...like Paul did?
- Why do we cringe at the thought of lowering ourselves and counting others more significant than ourselves?
 - It's insecurity...we are terrified of being low on the totem pole and we feel like we have to do everything we can to prove that we are important or valuable
 - I know the feeling, I grew up the youngest of 5, and I can't tell you how many times I've heard, "Kenny, you're the youngest, you don't even tell the dog what to do!"
- And in turn, I developed a complex where I thought I had to constantly prove that I was a

leader, that I had value, that I was worthy of recognition...

- And it's a mind set that I have to constantly fight against.
- Which is why I am so inspired by Paul, picking up the sticks...helping build the fires for everyone. No task being too small for him to help serve.
 - One of the most important things that I have ever been told before I became a pastor was, "If you're not willing to hold a toilet brush, you have no business holding a microphone."
- But Jesus gives us the blue print of how to cultivate a TRUE SERVANTS HEART
- If we know, and become confident and secure in the Father. Know that we have been given spiritual authority as Children of God, know that everything that we have comes from God, and that we will be returning to God once this vapor of a life is over,

- Well then we can begin to serve out of a place of true confidence and genuine love—no act of service becomes too insignificant for us
- Because we won't be looking to gain anything from anyone else because we will already be secure in everything we've been given in Christ
- Again, *"The more secure you are in your Heavenly position, the less insecure you will be in your earthly position."* —and you'll be able to serve freely, and make a lasting impact
- No one at this time, was more confident in their heavenly position than Paul...so he was serving, gathering the sticks for the fire...the problem was, one of those sticks was alive
 - And when he put a bundle of sticks on the fire, the flames woke up the hibernating viper, and it jumped out and latched onto Paul's hand
- The serpent struck while Paul was serving others...and it's true, if Paul had sat back and let the other people do the serving he wouldn't have gotten struck
- But because the serpent struck him, he had the opportunity to have a lasting impact on Malta
- You see, Greco-Roman lore spoke of the goddess of justice named Dikē, who was known to be the daughter of Zeus.
 - The job of this goddess was to bring justice upon those who had seemingly escaped it
 - Many times, according to their lore, Dikē would send vipers to bite escaped prisoners who were trying to avoid justice.
- So when the native people see this viper hanging from Paul's hand, they assume this is what's happening
 - But Paul just shakes the viper off into the fire...then he keeps on gathering sticks and building fires for people

- The natives are waiting for him to swell up and die in excruciating pain due to the venom...they're watching him as he walks over, puts a few more sticks on their fire as he just smiles and nods at them
- Minutes and hours go by and nothing is happening to him..they changed their minds and said that he must be a god
- And Luke doesn't give us the details of Paul's preaching to them and correcting their theology here—because by this time I think Luke thinks that should be assumed by his readers
 - And we know that this was corrected, because verse 10 says that they honored them—not worshiped them...like we had seen in Lystra back in chapter 14
 - But now, because of the influence he had over them because of how he had miraculously survived the bite of the serpent—they were invited to stay with the leader of the island in verse 7
- ***“Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him. And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured.” -Acts 28:7-9 (ESV)***
- Again, because Paul had served in a small way of helping build the fires—that led him to being able to serve and help the entire island
 - And he made a lasting impact—I know this because even to this day Malta is known to be one of the most Christian places in Europe
 - It's often referred to as “The Island of Paul”
 - In May of 1990, Pope John Paul II visited Malta and said that he could not wait to see the apostle Paul once this life was over and

say to him, “Paul, do you remember Malta? Do you remember that you founded a church in Malta, and I found after so many centuries that it is a wonderful church?”

- Paul had been through a storm and was shipwrecked—yet he still chose to simply serve others—he was then struck by a serpent—which opened the door to serve in a bigger capacity that led to a lasting impact on an entire culture
- We make a lasting impact through serving...
- ***“After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. And the brothers there,***

when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage.” -Acts 28:11-15 (ESV)

- Now, when I was first reading through this I was a little taken back, to be honest
 - Because the past few weeks we have been reading and studying with the anticipation of Paul getting to Rome so that he can share the Gospel
 - But then as soon as he gets there, he is greeted by the brothers—Christians
 - So we’ve been waiting through these storms and these shipwrecks and these winter months—for Paul to get the Gospel to Rome, but once he gets to Rome we see that the Gospel is already there!
- But this the next point: **WE MAKE A LASTING IMPACT: THROUGH RECOGNIZING IT’S GOD’S WORK**

- God was not depending on Paul to get the Gospel to Rome—God had already been moving there
- And when Paul saw the believers, he didn't get bent out of shape thinking, *"Wait a minute—I thought I was supposed to start something here, what have I been going though all of this for if its already been started??"*
 - No, Luke says when Paul saw the believers there, he thanked God and took courage
 - Paul knew this was God's work, not his
 - He had written a letter to the Christians in Rome 3 years prior
- If you remember, back in chapter 18 we saw that the Emperor Claudius had kicked all of the Jews out of Rome in 49 AD
 - He was worried that all of this turmoil among the Jewish people over the Christus—or the Christ
 - So he didn't want those problems in the Roman capital so he exiled all of the Jews from Rome
 - However, after Nero became Emperor in 54AD, the expulsion order ceased to be enforced...and most of the Jews returned back to Rome, many of whom had become Christians
 - Namely, Aquilla and Priscilla —who, as Romans 16 says, had a church meeting in their house.
- So there had already been a strong and growing Christian presence in and around Rome, and Paul had longed to see it with his own eyes
 - He wasn't trying to start something new, he was wanting to see what God was doing with his own eyes.
- **You see, this Christian life isn't about what we can do for God—it's about how we can be apart of what God is already doing.**

- I've heard it said, "If you want to be a part of a movement of God, go to where you see God moving."
- Because no matter where we ever go on mission for God, God has already been preparing the ground.
- There is never a time where God, has not gone before us.
- It reminds me of when Jesus was talking to the disciples in John chapter 4—Jesus had just had His encounter with the woman at the well.
- And the disciples are shocked that He would interact with a Samaritan woman.
 - But Jesus in a round-a-bout way, is explaining that He was going to use that woman as the catalyst for the greatest Samaritan revival of all time.
 - And in verse 35 He says, ***"Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest... For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another***

***reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."* -John 4:35-38 (CONDENSED)**

- Jesus is saying, "You may not have have started this—you may not have put the prayer and ministry into this, but God is working and you GET to be a part of it."
- I heard a quote one time that said, "No ministry is a result of one generation"
- You see, there had been judges and prophets and ancestors who were praying that the Messiah would come to these Samaritans, that they would be a radically changed people. And the time had come to answer all of those prayers
- The disciples were walking in on something, they didn't lay the ground work, but they were gonna get to see God move.

- I remember years back I was visiting the Billy Graham Library, and under a picture of one of his great revivals read a quote that said: ***“As a servant of Jesus Christ, I must say again and again how unworthy I felt to minister to the people of these lands. I was reaping where I did not sow, and it was a humbling experience. Any honor or credit for what has happened through this ministry belongs only to The Lord Jesus Christ, whom I serve.” -Billy Graham***

- Billy Graham understood that he had walked in on something. God had been laying a groundwork for generations before him, sowing those spiritual seeds, and Billy was reaping what he didn't sow.
- He recognized that everything that he was a part of was God's work and not his
- And keeping that perspective helped him make the lasting impact that he did across

our modern world —as the Apostle Paul did in his.

- It's the principle that we always have to remember—being on mission for God looks like us showing up and just watching God work.
 - You know, Jesus didn't roll the stone away so He could get out...He rolled the stone away so they could show up and see what He had already done.
 - And if continually recognize that it is His work, and not ours—we will be better equipped to handle the third quality for making an impact
- ***“And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him....He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with***

all boldness and without hindrance.” -Acts 16, 30-31 (ESV)

- Now, there is a chunk in there that we don't have time to walk through verse by verse
 - But as we referenced earlier—this is when Paul gathers the Jewish leaders together, and they say that they haven't heard anything negative against him—but they do want to hear more about this Christianity (or sect of The Way) that they have heard things against.
 - And they picked a day, and from morning to evening Paul expounded the scriptures, talked about the Kingdom of God, trying to convince them that Jesus was the Christ
- Luke said that some were convinced, others didn't believe
 - And they all left when Paul quoted Isaiah, when God said they would hear but not understand, see but not perceive, they would

have dull hearts and refuse to hear and understand what would truly heal them

- And this salvation through the Gospel is being sent to the gentiles who will listen
- Now, when Paul said that, they all leave him...and Paul doesn't get mad and take it personal because he was able to live out this 3rd principle
- **WE MAKE A LASTING IMPACT: THROUGH REFUSING TO BE A VICTIM**
- When did we ever see Paul allowing himself to be a victim?
 - When did he not use opposition as an opportunity to share the gospel?
 - When did he not turn a trial into a testimony?
 - When did he not use prison as a platform?
- We see that he gets two full years here under this house arrest. Because every prisoner that would come before Caesar's court would have

allotted a 2 year statutory period in which the accusers could come and present their case against the accused

- But apparently the accusers never show up, and maybe because the Roman officials before could never accept their testimonies against Paul and Rome had severe laws against false accusers
- If they were to go before Caesar and their accusations not hold weight, they could have been killed instead of Paul
- So as this 2 year period is being waited out... Paul doesn't just sit around
 - No, he was under a house arrest the entire time, and he couldn't go to people but people could come to him
 - He used this time to welcome all who would come to him
 - His prison became his pulpit

- As Pastor Skip Heitzig said, *"God's assignment was his confinement"*

- Paul used this time to share the Gospel with countless people, train leaders, this is when he wrote the letters to the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians, and to Philemon that would be preserved throughout history for us to learn from today
- When other people would crumble or feel sorry for themselves when experiencing all of the hardship and trials that Paul would experience through the rejections, the beatings, the stoning, the imprisonment, the storms, the shipwreck... Paul was so focused on God's work and serving others that he didn't have time to view himself as a victim
- In fact, for him it was quite the opposite
- When he wrote his letter to the Philippians during this time, he said this: ***"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the***

gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.” -Philippians 1:12-14 (ESV)

- Paul didn't see his chains as burden, he saw them as a blessing—he said that his imprisonment has been a benefit to advancing the Gospel!
- Not only have the other Christians been encouraged to be bold with their faith, he said the whole imperial guard has been introduced to Christ through this
- You see, Paul being under this house arrest means that he would have constantly been chained at the ankle to a Roman Imperial Guard at all times

- These guards would take 4-6 hours shifts, and would be there for every time Paul would teach, every time he would share...and I can only imagine how many personal conversations he would have with them
- Because in Paul's perspective he would say, “I'm not chained to these guards—these guards are chained to me!”
 - And he would not relent to miss any opportunity to share the Gospel with these men who served in the palace
 - And he did so— so much so —that in chapter 4 of Philippians he would write as he was concluding this letter: ***“All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.” -Philippians 4:22 (ESV)***
- So because of the time that he spent chained to imperial guards— there were soldiers, and servants, and family members of Caesars own household that came to know Jesus.

- Get this: **The longest period of Paul's imprisonment became the greatest period of Paul's impact**

- All because he refused to be a victim, acknowledged it was all God's work, and served others no matter what his situation was.
 - And we are still being impacted by what God did through him today
- Now, Luke ends this book kind of abruptly
- Because there has been all of this build up for Paul to appear before Caesar—but Luke doesn't even tell us if it happened
 - And we're left to piece together what might have happened from Paul's later letters and what the Christian historians had said
- And it seems like what happened was that Paul did get his time in front of Caesar in 62AD and was released from all charges.

- Many believe that he visited a few of the churches, and did actually get to Spain as he originally wanted to do.
 - But in 64AD Nero had spiraled out of control: Historians report that in 64 AD Nero had his people start a large fire in one of their regions to clear out land for a building project...and whenever he got public backlash, he blamed it on the Christians and their hatred of people
 - So he used Christians as a scapegoat and started the worst Christian persecution to date.
 - He began using their executions as sport and entertainment for the Roman public.
- During this time, it is believed that the Apostles Peter and Paul were both arrested again
- Peter was executed by being crucified upside down
 - And Paul, as a Roman citizen would not be subject to crucifixion, but he would be beheaded

- And while he was awaiting his execution he wrote one last final letter from prison to Timothy.
- And among his last written words, he says:

“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” -2 Timothy 4:6-8 (NIV)
- Even when facing his death, he refused to be a victim
- He didn’t see himself as a victim of death, but rather than death would be his ultimate victory:
 - Because everything that he had been through, it wasn’t a hard life—it was a good fight
 - He wasn’t about to be put out of his suffering—no, he was finishing a race
 - He didn’t just survive and endure—no, he kept the faith
- That’s all he wanted on his obituary—nothing about his accomplishments and achievements—no, all he wanted was the acknowledgement of His Savior
- He truly believed that to live is Christ and to die is gain...because nothing was about him
- Why do you think Luke ended the book the way he did??
 - Because we may be asking, “Wait! What happens next! What happens to Paul!”
 - But Luke was intentionally making sure that we knew, this book wasn’t about Paul
 - It’s not about his travels and accomplishments—No, this book is about the Gospel!

- It's about how the Gospel can't be chained, and the Gospel can't be stopped
- And Luke leaves this book the way that he does because in reality this book hasn't ended!
 - It's the book of Acts and God is still Acting!
 - We are part of the story now! God is still acting through us! The apostles may be gone, but we are still here!
 - And WE are to welcome all who come to us —WE are to proclaim the Kingdom of God— WE are to teach others about the Lord Jesus Christ—and WE are to do so with all boldness and without hindrance
- Because WE are still His witnesses to the ends of the earth
- The story doesn't stop with Paul, and the Story will not stop with us—this story will only stop whenever Jesus comes back in the same way that He left—like the angel told them that he would back in Acts chapter 1
 - And we are to praise, adore, and share the truth of our Great King until that day comes!
- So let's stand to our feet—and praise our King, for how good He is—for all that He's done for us—and beg Him to allow us to be a part of what He's doing!