

**Slide 1**

## **Our Continuing Story**

### **Acts 28:30-31**

#### **Introduction**

1. Most, if not all of us, enjoy a good story.
  - a. We enjoy a story with a good plot which keeps us engaged.
  - b. In our minds we tend to cheer for the hero or heroine as they fight for a good cause.
  - c. We find ourselves exhilarated when good triumphs over evil.
2. As we worship here this morning, you and I are part of such a story.
3. How is this possible?
4. The book of Acts has no ending.
  - a. These last two verses present Paul as living in Rome for two full years, in his own rented quarters, welcoming everyone who came to him, while awaiting his trial before Caesar.
  - b. He continues as he has done since becoming a Christian and apostle of Jesus Christ, “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:31).
5. But what about the promise made to him by the angel of God, before he was ship-wrecked off the island of Malta, that he would stand before Caesar (Acts 27:24).

“Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar . . .” (Acts 27:24, NASB95)
6. What about his plans as he mentioned in his letter (written from Corinth) to the church in this very city to go to Spain (Romans 15:23b-24, 28).

“ . . . since I have had a longing to come to you whenever I go to Spain—for I

hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while—” (Romans 15:23b-24, NASB95)

“Therefore, when I have finished this, — taken the contribution from the churches in Macedonia & Achaia to the poor among the saints in Jerusalem — and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain.” (Romans 15:28, NASB95)

7. As well as his plans — when released from his Roman imprisonment — to go visit Philemon who lived somewhere near Colosse (Philemon 22).

“At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.” (Philemon 22, NASB95)

8. The truth is that Luke doesn’t tell us what happened to Paul, just as he doesn’t tell us what eventually happened to Peter or any of the other apostles, except for James, the brother of John who was put to death at the hands of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1).
9. The reason, I believe, is because his focus is upon the Word of God and the lives it changed and continual growth of the body of Christ.
10. I believe there is another reason that Luke leaves this book open-ended — it is because the work of the Holy Spirit did not end in Rome or anywhere else for that matter.
11. The work of the Holy Spirit is ongoing as the Word of God continues to be taught and preached — this story continues to be written by every Christian and the body of Christ which continues to assemble around the world today.
12. But for this story to continue and for this congregation here today to have a positive part in that story, we must have the same tri-directional focus as we find in the Book of Acts.

## Slide 2

# I. An Upward Focus: Worship

## A. THE EXAMPLE OF THE EARLY CHURCH

1. In Acts 2:42, Luke tells us that the congregation of God's people which began in Jerusalem was a worshiping church:

“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).

2. An upward focus dominated their lives.
3. They were worshiping daily in the temple and devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles.
4. When they partook of the Lord's Supper together, they were remembering through the breaking of the bread and the partaking of the fruit of the vine, what the Lord had done for them.

## 2a

### **B. THE HIGHEST PRIORITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE**

1. In Deuteronomy 6:4-5 God gives to the Israelites what Jesus would later call the greatest commandment:

“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” (Deuteronomy 6:4–5, NASB95)

2. The words of David, near the end of his life, as he praised the Lord are worth our remembering today:

“Blessed are You, O Lord God of Israel our father, forever and ever. “Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all.” (1 Chronicles 29:10b–11, NASB95)

3. When Satan tried to tempt Jesus to fall down and worship him, Jesus responded with “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’” (Matthew 4:10; cf. Luke 4:8)

## 2b

### **C. THE PRIMARY CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CHURCH**

1. In Psalm 46:10, God says “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”
2. The Psalms themselves are hymns, written to praise the Lord of heaven and earth, to acknowledge what He has done and to seek Him in a time of great need (cf. Psalms 111, 112, 113)
3. If we are to be a church which carries on the work begun in Acts then worship must be a priority.
4. We must be careful when we come together for worship that we do not treat . . .
  - a. The prayers as time to shut our eyes and think about what we need to get done today or this week.
  - b. The singing as an opportunity to slip into neutral.
  - c. The preaching of God’s Word as something to endure.
5. Please do not leave worship behind when you leave this building today, but to spend the rest of this week reaching up to God, praying heartfelt prayers which are your own and not words from someone else’s lips which you have committed to memory.

#### **Slide 3**

## **II. An Inward Focus: Care for One Another**

### **A. DEVOTION TO FELLOWSHIP**

“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship.” (Acts 2:42).

1. The KJV and NKJV translate this as “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship.”
2. “Continually devoting” and “continued steadfastly” come from one Greek word (προσκαρτερέω) which means “to occupy yourself diligently with

something” (Strong)

- a. Have you ever been doing something you just couldn’t walk away from.
  - b. These Christians in Jerusalem just couldn’t walk away from their fellowship.
3. The word “fellowship” doesn’t mean simply a meal as we have come to see it so often:
    - a. It implies sharing with someone or in something.
    - b. It is an association which involves close mutual relations and involvement.
  4. Every time it is used in the N.T. it involves some kind of sharing . . .
    - a. Either sharing something with someone (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13)

[The churches of Macedonia were] “begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints,” (2 Corinthians 8:4, NASB95)

“Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all,” (2 Corinthians 9:13, NASB95)

- b. Or sharing in what someone else is experiencing.

“Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16, NASB95)

- The early Christians cared for one another. They were socially and materially part of one another’s lives.

**3a**

## **B. CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER’S MATERIAL WELFARE**

1. When we bring this forward to today, it means that our care for one another within this congregation is to be second only to worship.

2. In Acts 2:44-45 it is said of the church in Jerusalem, “And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.”

**3b**

**C. CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER’S SPIRITUAL WELFARE**

1. As members of the family of God, we are to encourage one another.
2. We look after each other’s spiritual well-being and pray for one another (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:15).

“I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls.” (2 Corinthians 12:15, NASB95).

3. If we are among the older segment of this congregation, we should do our best to look out for those young families and younger members in this congregation.
4. Those of you who are younger, pay attention to the needs of the older members of our church family.
5. Jesus told his disciples, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).
6. When others truly see such loving care displayed within this church, they will conclude that we are disciples of the living God.

**Slide 4**

**III. An Outward Focus: Striving To Reach the World With the Message of Christ**

**A. THE THEME OF THE BOOK OF ACTS**

1. Jesus told the apostles just before His ascension back to His Father, “you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and

even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8b).

2. Acts chapters 2-7 tell of the spread of the Gospel “in Jerusalem”.
3. Acts chapters 8-11 reveal its impact upon “all Judea and Samaria”.
4. Acts chapters 12-28 focus on its progress “to the remotest part of the earth”.
5. So powerful was the gospel that by the end of the first century Christians could be found throughout the Roman Empire.

4a

### **B. IT IS A FOCUS THAT REQUIRES BALANCE**

1. Reaching the world with the Gospel of Christ does not mean that we focus on foreign missions to the neglect of our own neighborhoods.
2. Neither does it mean that we meet only the immediate needs around us here at home and neglect millions around the world who have not heard the good news.
3. No, we must reach our neighbors and the world with God’s message, using our time, our money, ourselves and our children.
4. We must put everything we have into the hands of Christ and allow Him to use it all in His way, in His time, for others’ salvation and His glory.

### **Conclusion**

1. There is one final statement from the lips of the apostle Paul which I would like for you to consider this morning.
2. It is among the last words he spoke to the elders from Ephesus at the end of his third missionary journey as he was making his way back to Jerusalem.

“But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20:24, NASB95)

3. The acts of the apostles were finished long ago with the death of each of those men commissioned by our Lord to carry forth the Gospel to “the end of the

earth” (Acts 1:8, ESV).

4. However, the acts of those of us who are followers of Jesus will continue until the end of the world.
5. The question for us is will we be a vital part of this story?
6. Will we be a church that . . .
  - a. Looks upward — praising and adoring our Father and His Son with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength?
  - b. Looks inward — caring for one another materially and spiritually with a love which declares to the world our devotion to Christ.
  - c. Looks outward — having a passion for souls in need of the saving power of Christ’s blood both here and abroad.
7. Do not let this church become a monument to great things done in the past, but a powerful beacon pointing men and women heavenward until our Lord comes again in all His glory!