

Acts: The Church on Earth

Upon Examination

Acts 25:13-26:1

A primer on Acts to catch us up:

- **Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit and ascension**
 [John 14:16-18 NKJV] "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever-- "the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, **for He dwells with you and will be in you.** "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.
- **Pentecost** - The Holy Spirit fills the believers and jump starts the church
Pentecost changes everything
 Before - Holy Spirit's influence, would be upon believers of history (David, Saul, prophets) but the Veil still separated
Now - the church age. Believers indwelt by the Spirit, but also gifts given. Can actually serve God with God's power
 [John 16:7-8 NKJV] "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. **"And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:**
- **Their Focus was on Jesus**
 [Acts 5:40-42 NKJV] ...when they had called for the apostles and beaten [them], they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. **And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus [as] the Christ.**

[Acts 13:49 KJV] And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.

The church wasn't a building made of hands, but of people held together by the holes in Jesus' hands. They wanted to know Him more and to make sure everyone else knew Him too. They didn't primarily care about their lives anymore.

What is our focus?

What is important in the churches we belong to?

Is it like the early church? Are we there, in motive, at the center, to simply know Jesus and make him known? Or has something else taken that seat?

Don't feel bad, most of the New Testament and the beginning of Revelation are attempts

to course correct the church.

We, like the Israelites in the wilderness, tend to wander. And we have the Holy Spirit in us, not just a cloud of fire in front of us.

Late Pastor Tony, doing a lot of events, outreach, studies. All going well. Cancelled them all for a month and had the church gather to simply focus on Jesus and make sure it was all for him. Then they picked back up and did a big outreach that the Lord used in a big way in their community.

Not to pick on the church, I know we're all looking for a good one. And that sentiment I hear from friends scattered around the country...

But what is the American church really about?

I'm not talking about the obviously errant denominations who are endorsing all kinds of abominations

But your average church, protestant, evangelical...non denominational or part of a denomination...

*Maybe we were spoiled in our home church in NY for many years
It wasn't perfect, in fact, it lost its way and fell apart and people were scattered
But for a long season, it was very healthy and many people came to the Lord and other churches were planted out of it*

Is it events? Putting on enough events to make the community happy?

Not necessarily share the gospel, but do good things in the community, VBS, outreach, etc.

In a conversation with a well-meaning pastor friend, he talked about how much backlash he got from the community, even "believers" and church folks, for sharing the gospel big at their first large outreach. Since then, he's scaled that back in an attempt to woo people in...

Visiting churches. Some we've gone completely unnoticed (all six of us). Some we've been flooded with warm greetings, feeling very welcomed, even staying for a while. We've seen great kids ministry, no kids ministry, great worship, some not so great musically. Some good teaching, some so unhealthy (at best) doctrine of demon (at worst) that we left in the middle of the service and took our kids out of kids ministry. We had been so hopeful when visiting that church, too.

It bothers me. How can we be the church and it's so hard to find a good one?

Well, what's a good one?

The 5 spokes to the Christian wheel (personally and corporately)

The Word
Worship
Evangelism
Fellowship
Prayer

Many of these churches do a lot of these things. **Nobody is perfect.** Don't get me wrong, but there still seems to be something missing in our churches these days. Could it be the Lord? Could it be the Holy Spirit?

How come I notice it? What do I know? I'm nobody!

Conversation with Pastor Vinny

We thought we were on fire in America for so long. Could it be that the world is just so cold (-38 anyone?) and we're barely warmer but it seems relatively hot?

Words of Jesus to the church of the last days, Laodecia

[Revelation 3:16 NKJV] "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

One last point - maybe, like our society, we've forgotten what church is all about. We've forgotten what a family really is. We've gotten so selfish that we just want our flesh to be happy with a fancy service, a message that doesn't bother us or change our present course and is just how to "live a good life." Maybe worse, we don't really want a relationship with Jesus, but we like the things that go along with it.

Talking with kids last night...God in us, living his life through us, we get to go along for the ride. Why would we want anything less?

Back to Acts

- The church, mostly Jewish people turned to Jesus, face persecution
- Now it's time for a light unto the Gentiles (of Europe, of Asia, of Africa)
- Paul (Saul) present at Stephen's stoning
- His conversion

[Acts 9:13-16 NKJV] Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. "And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." But the Lord said to him, **"Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."**

[Pray]

Paul had been preaching to the Jews, they didn't like it, wanted to kill him.
 Roman soldiers broke up the riots.
 Paul began to sit before different regional authorities.

Remember, Rome ruling over the world, was controlling Israel at the time "Palestine"
 Think our occupation of Iraq or Afghanistan, but more invested and permanent and police-like.

Brought before regional leader Felix, wife was a Jewess, hears Paul for a while. Paul treated well, relatively. But left in prison, Felix wanting a bribe.

Interested in the spiritual things, but the love of money...
 God was using it though. God's call on Paul was to bring him before these very people as a witness.

God gives everyone on earth opportunities to hear the gospel and repent. Whether they do or not is on them.

Pop star proclaiming Jesus is finding herself banned and under fire.

Fetus, slightly higher up the food chain comes around, and now hears Paul

Paul appeals to Caesar (his Roman right)

Going all the way to the Supreme Court

Read 25:13-15

The Jewish King arrives, maybe late on purpose, IDK, to greet Festus

This bureaucratic power struggle and system

Everyone's in charge and no one's in charge.

Many more days... then they hear Paul

Talk about a slow legal system

Imagine Paul, still in prison. No updates. Wrongfully imprisoned, he'd done nothing wrong, as the rulers admit...but this is where God has him.

The folks walking across the country sharing the gospel, having run ins with locals, imprisoned...in America.

*The man kicked out of the mall of america for his Jesus shirt.
The woman arrested in Britain for praying SILENTLY outside of an abortion clinic*

The Jews informed me about him asking for a sentence against him

There was no crime, they were simply offended

And we think we're so modern!

:16-21

Custom - ethos, can be custom or law

Obviously there's wiggle room in how these rulers are executing the law

"It's a living document!"

Paul was a Roman citizen, his case would need to at least appear air tight

But all of these leaders are struggling with the politics.

The mob they rule over wants something done

But the Roman laws that put them in power also show that they have no legal case against Paul

Stand before his accusers

We get a lot of the basis for our legal system from the Roman one

No secret courts, at least by law

Festus was expecting some actual crimes, but nothing was apparent

It was a religious argument

And I doubt he put much stock in religion, even if he was into all the Roman gods

I think much like our legal system, they could care less about what one sect believes or another.

Is it against the law?

What got him was this, v19

A Man Named Jesus who they said was dead but Paul said was alive

Festus doesn't mention the resurrection, I think he's being so practical as to say one group thinks he died the other says he didn't

Festus wanted to go back to Jerusalem and let the locals deal with it

You know, I would have sent it to you King Agrippa, but Paul wants Caesar

:22-27, 26:1

I'd like to hear the man myself, Agrippa is intrigued for one reason or another

But tomorrow!
Just like Congress, they've done enough work for today!

Came with great pomp

They love the show. They love making a scene and wallowing in their authority
You know, like most politicians

V24 Shouting that he ought not to live any longer

Not just canceled, they want Paul dead...for preaching the gospel

[1 Corinthians 1:18-19 NKJV] For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

[Galatians 5:11 NKJV] And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased.

[1 Peter 2:7-8 NKJV] Therefore, to you who believe, [He is] precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

V25 I found that he committed nothing worthy of death

Was he really worthy of anything else, though?

He himself appealed to Caesar...

Passing the buck, it's Paul's fault I have to do this

I have nothing to write...maybe you can help me pin something on him. Trump up some charges that will make sense as to why I'm wasting Caesar's time with this.

You know, he could just let Paul go since there's no obvious charge! But the mob is ruling!

Unreasonable to send? How about unlawful?

Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself."
Let's hear this out.

[Matthew 10:19-20 NKJV] "But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; "for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

I often wonder what people should really do in legal situations of their faith. Do they need a lawyer? Would a lawyer twist the truth from getting out?

In America we at least have laws on the books, the constitution, based on biblical principles at times, for a fair trial.

But when there is no fair trial, as things seem to be in our country today, the mob rules, is it our job as Christians to make sure we get one? Or to simply preach the truth to the powers in front of us and let God handle it?

Paul could be wanting to go free, but I think Paul also knew his calling. To preach the gospel to kings...and there was no earthly king higher than Caesar. Either on purpose or by divine providence, here was the way to do just that.