

**Theme:** As You Are Going: The Church on Mission

**Message:** The Rest of the Story – Acts 21-28

**Aim:** Realize our part in the rest of the story of Acts.

**Intro:** I will date myself & some of you w/this reference: how many remember Paul Harvey? Paul Harvey was an American radio broadcaster for ABC News Radio for over 50 years, from 1951-2008. He is probably best known for his “Rest of the Story” segments, where he would give obscure facts about well-known people, like the story of “Skinny,” a young man bullied by his peers for having a girl’s name, Marion. Beaten up on one occasion, he was taught by a local fireman to box & while he didn’t win on the next occasion, he fought to a draw & won the respect of the bully. His nickname was changed to the Duke & he went on to become an iconic, man-inspiring actor, John Wayne, the Duke. Harvey would famously say, “And now you know the rest of the story.” Our theme this year has been “As you are going: the Church on mission.” Pastor Derek & I have taken us through the book of Acts, w/the ministry of Peter & Phillip & Stephen & Paul. We have seen there in Acts how the gospel moved as Jesus said it would, by God’s design, from Jerusalem & all Judea & Samaria & to the end of the earth – not quite the end of the earth by the end of Acts, but moving outward, as Phillip reached the Ethiopian Eunuch who took the gospel back to his homeland, & Peter traveled to Caesarea to share the gospel w/the Gentile Cornelius. Then Paul essentially took over the book of Acts & we read of his 3 missionary journeys, into Asia Minor & Macedonia & Greece & what is modern day Turkey, preaching the gospel & planting churches. But what’s the rest of the story? That’s what we want to consider today – the rest of the story of Paul in the book of Acts, the rest of the story of the spread of the gospel & the rest of the story for us. Acts 21-28 is our text, so if you are able, please stand as we read – just kidding! Let’s just walk thru these 8 chapters. I) **The Rest of the Story for Paul.** At the end of chapter 20, Paul was on his way to Jerusalem, wanting to be there before Pentecost. In chapter 21 the journey continued, stopping in Tyre for the ship he was on to unload cargo. While there for 7 days, Paul called for & met disciples from the area. From Tyre they sailed to Ptolemais, again meeting w/disciples there.

From there they sailed to Caesarea & stayed w/Philip the evangelist (chap8) & his daughters. Noteworthy here is the warning/urging Paul received from those he visited. Everywhere Paul went & w/whomever he visited they warned him not to go to Jerusalem – folks in Tyre; Phillip’s daughters, who were prophetesses, & one Agabus, who role-played the message. “They are going to bind you & deliver you into the hands of the Gentiles.” Also of note is Paul’s response in vs13 – “What are you doing, weeping & breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” Like Jesus, who “set His face like flint to go to Jerusalem,” knowing what awaited Him, so Paul was determined to go to Jerusalem. Are we so resolved & determined to do God’s will & be on mission w/for God? When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he went to see James & the elders of the church there, sharing w/them all that God had done on his missionary journeys. Then they warned him that many of the “zealous for the law” Jews had heard rumors about him & were certain he was leading Jews astray from God. They urged him to display his regard for the law by taking some men under a vow (probably Nazarite) & “purify yourself along w/them & pay their expenses” in the temple. Then they would see that he was not anti-law, anti-Moses. Paul did that but was accused of bringing Greeks into the temple & defiling it (not true). He had been w/some Greeks who had traveled w/him, but he didn’t bring them into the temple. They seized Paul, dragged him out of the temple & were about to kill him when Roman soldiers were sent to break up the commotion. They arrested Paul & put him in chains. As they were taking him away, he asked if he could speak to the people. He gave his 1<sup>st</sup> defense, this before the Jewish leaders/people who wanted to kill him. He gave his testimony. They listened to him as he spoke in Hebrew, up until the point that he said that God sent him to the Gentiles. For his safety & for order, he was taken to the Roman barracks & ordered to be “examined by flogging” – beat him until he talked. Paul asked if it was lawful to flog a Roman citizen who was as yet uncondemned. That stopped that. The next day he was brought before his accusers, the Romans still trying to figure out what caused all this uproar. Again, Paul gave his defense, now a 2<sup>nd</sup> time. Even the Pharisees acknowledged that

they could find nothing wrong in Paul. But others still wanted to kill him, so the soldiers took him out. Noteworthy here, in 23:11, Paul had a vision of the Lord Jesus standing beside him & saying “***Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about Me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.***” Paul had long said he wanted to go to Rome; now he would get the chance. Then 40 of the Jews plotted to kill Paul, asking the chief priests to ask for him to be brought before them again, planning to ambush the soldiers & kill him. By God’s providence, Paul’s nephew overheard the plot, told Paul, who directed him to the tribune. They sent Paul w/200 soldiers, 70 horsemen & 200 spearmen to Caesarea to be presented to the governor, Felix. The Jews sent a lawyer to Caesarea to accuse Paul before Felix but again, Paul was able to give his defense a 3<sup>rd</sup> time, speaking of the resurrected Lord Jesus. Paul was kept in custody for 2 years, w/Felix often summoning him to hear from him & hoping to receive money from him. Paul “***reasoned about righteousness & self-control & the coming judgment***” (24:25), to the point that Felix was alarmed, yet did not come to faith. I wonder how many who also heard Paul’s testimony of Christ may have come to faith. After those 2 yrs, Felix was succeeded by Festus, who asked Paul if he wanted to go to Jerusalem to be tried there. Paul said no. “***I am standing before Caesar’s tribunal, where I ought to be tried...I appeal to Caesar.***” Festus agreed, but didn’t know quite how to present the case to Caesar. It just so happened that the Jewish puppet king arrived & Festus sought his help. So, Paul able to give his defense again, the 4<sup>th</sup> time, this time giving the purpose to which Christ had called him to be apostle to the Gentiles – 26:18 – “***To open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light & from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins & a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.***” That’s our reason for going & proclaiming the truth of the gospel as well. It hasn’t changed over all these years. Agrippa & Festus agreed that there was nothing that Paul had done deserving death or imprisonment & that if he had not appealed to Caesar could have been released. Paul would be sent to Rome, to appear before Caesar. On the way the ship ran into a violent storm & they were shipwrecked on the island of Malta, today a resort area. Paul got to go on a cruise, but not a

pleasant one. On Malta Paul was bitten by a viper & when he didn't die the natives there thought he was a god. The chief of the Island had a father who was sick & Paul visited him & prayed for him & he was healed. That opened the way for the gospel to be preached, heard by the natives & all who survived the shipwreck. They were there for 3 months, then set sail again & soon arrived in Rome. He was under house arrest, but able to receive visitors. He called for Jews in Rome to come to him & again he testified "*to the kingdom of God & [tried] to convince them about Jesus...*" (28:23). Some believed, some did not. Paul "*lived there 2 whole years at his own expense, & welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God & teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ w/all boldness & w/out hindrance*" (28:30-31). Note the last 2 words in the book: "w/out hindrance." Paul was able to preach the gospel in Rome, even to soldiers & those in Caesar's household (Philippians 4:22). That's the rest of the story of Paul in Acts. After those 2 yrs, he was released, & tradition tells us he went to Spain to preach the gospel there. Eventually, he was arrested again sometime later & executed under Nero. But Paul didn't stop preaching the gospel & being on mission w/God, for God. And tho opposed, the gospel has been unhindered throughout history. Consider II) **The Rest of the Story through history**. Watch this video clip about the spread of Christianity. Thruout history the gospel has continued to be spread in spite of attempts to stop its flow. Now look at this map about the spread of Christianity throughout the world. Tho some are nominally Christian only, many are true Christians. Tho some areas are not considered Christian, for the majority of the world, Christianity is the majority religion. There have been countless heroes of the faith who saw the gospel go forth. Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Polycarp, Constantine, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Wycliffe, John Hus, Thomas a Kempis, Gutenberg, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, William Tyndale, Blaise Paschal, John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, John & Charles Wesley, David Brainard – missionary to the Indians, William Carey, Adonriam Judson, Charles Finney, Hudson Taylor, Charles Spurgeon, Billy Sunday, C.S. Lewis, Deitrich Bonhoffer, Billy Graham, Jim Elliot, & many, many more, besides

untold, unknown others, who have taken the gospel to the world. And it keeps spreading – Europe, Africa, South America, North America, the Pacific islands, India, China, Indonesia, etc. Jesus said, “***Go into all the world & proclaim the gospel to the whole creation***” (Mark 16:15). He also said, “***This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, & then the end will come***” (Matthew 24:14). Tho there are yet unreached people groups, the gospel has gone forth & is going forth. That brings it down to us. What is III) **The Rest of the Story for you/me?** As Pastor Derek exhorted us last week, we are called to be ambassadors for Christ, ministers of reconciliation, God making His appeal thru us (II Cor. 5:20). God would use us to reach our family members & neighbors & friends & co-workers & fellow students for Christ. Everyone needs Jesus & we’re the ones to tell them, not beating them over the head but lovingly sharing Jesus as we live our lives before them in such a way for them to see Jesus in us. The names of the lost known to us should be a subject of our prayers every day. The tenets of the gospel – that God created us for Himself but because of sin we are kept from Him, but by His sovereign grace He sent His own Son to take on our likeness, live a perfectly righteous life & pay the penalty for us so that by faith in Him we might be reconciled to God & made to be His children. It’s God’s work but He chooses to do it thru us. We stand on the shoulders of giants of the faith who have been faithful to make disciples for Christ. That burden is on our shoulders now. As we are going, let us be on mission w/God, for God. God help us be His church on mission!