

Acts 28:1-16

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[0 : 00] Good morning.

It's good to be here. It's good to be here with you. If you haven't figured out, during the hot days of the summer, our church has, just like SeaWorld, splash zones. There are places where the fans blow.

So if you are dying of heat, get up, move around, find a place where you can be comfortable as we look at God's Word together. I don't want you dying out there. I know it's getting a little warm. But it is a good day to be here in the house of the Lord together. So let's rejoice in that. You know, it's one of the best opening scenes in modern television history.

A man lying on the ground and an eye pops open. Do you remember it? Some of you are too young to have seen the first episode of the series *Lost* that was a huge hit for 10 years.

[1 : 28] That eye belonged to Jack Shepard. And as he raised himself up in the middle of a bamboo forest, ran frantically trying to find out where he was, and emerged onto a beach where at first silence as he looked one way and then the other way.

Chaos. The sound of an airplane engine whirring in the background, overwhelming everything else, screams and cries. And you realize that Jack Shepard had just been in a plane accident.

The plane had gone down. And Jack was emerging into this scene of chaos. Bewildered. Afraid. Uncertain.

Thankful to be alive. But confused. What do I do now? Where do I go? How do I proceed? Friends, we haven't been in an airplane crash.

I would imagine most of you. I don't know. Maybe someone has. But I think that this is something that happens to us often in life. We go through some change.

[2 : 41] We go through some transition. And suddenly we're in this new situation. And we don't know where we are. And we don't know where we're going. And we wonder, how do we go forward from here?

What does that look like? Some of you are starting school this week. Maybe it's a new school. Maybe it's a new town for you. Some of you are heading back to elementary school or junior high or high school.

And as you walk in that first day, some of you have, some of you will do it tomorrow. You may experience a similar disorientation. And ask the same questions.

Why am I here? What has brought me here? How am I going to get through this? And friends, it doesn't even need to take a life transition for that to happen.

Sometimes life just comes at you, doesn't it? And brings something unexpected. Bring something overwhelming. And you find yourself in this place of bewilderment and fear and uncertainty.

[3 : 45] And as we stand there, we ask the question, God, where are you? God, why am I here? God, how do I move forward from here?

What is it going to look like for me to move ahead from where I am right now? Well, friends, that's where our passage this morning takes us.

We are in Acts 28. That's page 937 in your pew Bible. If you've not been here all summer, we are preaching through the end of the book of Acts.

And this is the penultimate sermon. Greg will wrap it up next week. But this week is the second to last one. And our passage speaks to that kind of disorientation and confusion and speaks words of hope.

If you remember last week, Pastor Nick read chapter 27. Paul is a prisoner being taken to Rome. And he's on a ship that ultimately wrecks in the sea.

[4 : 56] And as we begin this passage, Paul and all the people in the ship have not been saved from the storm. They have not been saved from the shipwreck.

But through the storm and through the shipwreck, God has carried them. And God has brought them to the beach like Jack Shepard. Wondering, why are we here and where do we go from here? So, let's read together Acts chapter 28. We're going to read verses 1 through 16 together. 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 the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.

[6 : 06] 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 he was a god.

Now, in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief men 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. They honored us greatly. They also honored us greatly.

And when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed. After three months, we set sail on a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria with the twin gods as figurehead.

[7 : 10] Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. And from then, we made a circuit and arrived at Regium. 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. And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier who guarded him.

Let's pray together. Lord, we are thankful for your word. For in it, you speak to us. And Lord, you speak to us not only information about you or what has happened in the past.

But Lord, you speak to us words of life. Words that are meant to encourage our souls. To turn our gaze towards you and to see you in all your majesty and beauty.

[8 : 19] Holy Spirit, I invite you this morning. Help us to understand your word rightly. And to respond as you would have us to this morning. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. In this odd little passage, this odd narrative stuck at the end of this long book about God's work in building his church, what do we see?

What is there for us this morning? I think we see this. We see a portrait. It is a portrait of God's provision for his people pursuing his mission.

I want to talk about two key aspects of that this morning. I want to talk about how God, both in building the early church in Acts and still today, God is active.

I want to talk about what it is to understand his mission and what it is to understand his provision for his people. This is the big picture.

[9 : 27] God's provision for his people pursuing his mission. You may not have noticed it. The most important verse, I think, in the big picture of this book of Acts is verse 14.

It is actually just the very last part of verse 14. Right? What does it say? Look with me. And so we came to Rome.

This is the most exciting thing that we have seen in eight chapters in the book of Acts. Because Paul has been trying to get here for eight chapters.

Why? Why? Why is that so important for Paul? If you go back, you realize Paul had gone to Jerusalem and there had been arrested and accused.

He had been brought before various courts. And in defending his ministry and in proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, he had found himself imprisoned and on this inexorable process of heading towards Rome.

[10:37] He had actually appealed. He wanted to testify before Caesar. He'd appealed to go to Caesar so that he could testify. And so this is in some ways the climax of this whole great narrative from the last chapters.

Now a cynic might think the big reason why Paul wanted to go to Rome is simply so that Paul could defend himself and be vindicated and be shown to be not a rebel against the Roman Empire.

And that this is simply a theological discussion between Jews and the new believers in Jesus. But I don't think that's all that it was. Paul, even though he was in chains, saw Rome as an opportunity. An opportunity for a number of things. If you go back in Acts 27, in the middle of the chapter, God himself comes and says, You're going to survive this shipwreck because you will testify before Caesar.

You will tell him about the grace of God and what he has done in Jesus Christ. So God himself reminded Paul, This is why you're going to Rome.

[11:47] So you can testify, not about your innocence, but about the work of God in Christ. We also see from the book of Romans that Paul had long wanted to go to Rome to bless the church, to be with them, to encourage one another.

It's what we see in Romans 1. And in Romans 15, we see that Paul had a greater vision too. That Paul wanted to get to Rome to encourage the brothers there, but he wanted to go beyond that. He wanted to take the good news of Jesus Christ beyond to Spain. He saw Rome as the launching point for a new mission to reach people who had never before heard about Christ.

Friends, this was Paul's mission. And you know what? It was a costly one, wasn't it? It was a costly one because he wasn't going willingly to Rome at one level, was he?

He was in chains. He was a prisoner. He was not a free man choosing to go where he would and when he wanted to. But he was pulled along by those who held him captive.

[13:04] And in those chains, he suffered years in prison, shipwrecks. It's pretty remarkable. And for Paul, as he saw this cost, he thought, well, this is worth it.

Why? Because I get to tell others about Jesus. I get to tell others that he is not dead, but he is risen. And that makes all the difference in the world. And so with that sense of vision, even though the cost on his life was high, he was able to even walk through it in an incredibly gracious way.

As he pursued this mission, strikingly in this story, he was gathering wood. Right? He's not thinking, okay, I've been saved.

God said I'm going to get to Rome. I'm just going to sit back and let people take care of me. Right? They shipwrecked. They were cold. They were wet. It had started to rain. And so Paul goes out and he's gathering wood.

Expending himself yet more for the sake of others. Later on in our story, in verses 8 and 9, Paul's welcomed in. You might have thought, oh man, Publius, this is like a day at the spa.

[14:18] I finally get to relax. I get some refreshment. Oh, this is nice. I need a break. But Paul didn't see that. Paul heard, oh, his father is sick.

Let me go pray for him and ask the Lord to heal him. And then when he did, it wasn't just him, but the whole island, all the sick people on the island came to visit Paul.

And during his time there, he had a ministry of healing the sick. And so we see Paul pursuing the mission that God had put on his life to testify to the grace of God.

It is why he's on the ship. It is why he acts the way he does towards those in this story. I wonder, friends, what about you? What is the mission you're on this morning?

I'm here to tell you that God has a mission for you if you will take it up. In Acts 17, verses 26 and 27, Paul, preaching to the Athenians, quotes this remarkable statement.

[15:42] He says, I'm going to paraphrase here. He says, God has determined the places that you live and the times that you live. God knows that you are here in New Haven today.

It's not an accident. God has determined these things for you and he's determined them for a purpose. A purpose that you might seek God and that you might find him for he's not far from you. I don't know if you may be here this morning and thinking, I don't actually know why I'm in church. I'm not usually here. I'm exploring this.

Or maybe you're thinking, I've been going to church for a long time and I'm about ready to pull the plug. God has you here this morning.

God has you here in New Haven so that you might seek him and you might find him. But friends, this is just the beginning of God's great call in your life.

[16:46] In 1 Peter chapter 2, Paul, I'm sorry, the apostle Peter reminds the believers that he's writing to, ironically, probably in Rome, probably suffering great trials, he reminds them, God has made you his special people, a chosen race, a royal people, a people belonging to him.

God has called all believers in Christ into his family, but not just so that they might be saved from the storm, but so that they might also then, as he goes on, he says, in order that you may declare the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and into the kingdom of his beloved son. This is the calling for all who claim the name of Christ, that we should boast about our Savior, that we would say, there is no one like him.

There is none other in the world who has been what he is for me. This comes in joy, in worship. It comes in testimony of this is how he's changed our lives. It comes in the proclamation to a dying world that is losing hope, that there is a Savior, and he is the best thing that you will ever find.

[18:20] And so, friends, he calls you to take up this mission. He calls you to embrace this. Some of you are going to be in New Haven for a couple of years.

Some of you will be in New Haven for the rest of your lives. Some of you are newly arrived. Some of you have lived your whole life here. The question is not actually where you are.

The question is, whose mission are you on? God has a mission for you to know him and to make him known. It's easy.

It's easy for us to slide into having a very self-centered mission for our lives. I'm just here to get my degree and get out of here.

I don't even like the Northeast. And it hasn't even snowed yet. Some of you are thinking, I know, I know, but I just got to raise my family, earn my money, get my ducks in order.

[19:28] Eventually, I can do that, but not now. I'm too busy. I got too much other things to do with my life. Friends, God says, no, this is not your mission.

He has called you here to be great students. He has caused you here to raise your families.

Whatever your life situation here, God has called you here.

And he wants you to honor him in how you do those things diligently and well and with an eye to the glory of God. But friends, if we pursue those things and we lose the mission of knowing God and making him known, we have lost our way.

Some of you may be this morning disillusioned and weary.

You've been in the church for a long time and you think, I've walked that road. I'm tired of it. It's too hard. We will see in just a minute that God's provision for you is sufficient to refresh your weary soul and to see that though it is hard and the cost is great, there is no mission that is more worthwhile.

[20:54] There is no higher calling than to live for Christ and his kingdom. Some of you may know the story of a man named William Borden.

He was an heir to the great Borden Dairy fortune. He came to New Haven in 1905 as a freshman at Yale.

He had every human advantage it seemed. He was an outstanding student becoming the president of Phi Beta Kappa. He was an outstanding athlete known as a rower and a sailor and a wrestler.

When he came to New Haven, when he began his years at Yale, he purposed that he was going to be here for the sake of Christ and his kingdom.

He purposed to begin to pray for all of his classmates. His sophomore year, he gathered a few of his classmates together and they created a systematic approach to engaging every student in his class so that they would know the good news of Jesus Christ.

[22:11] But he didn't live with the myopic view of just the ivory tower that he was in. For he also lived in New Haven when it was a great port city. And he saw the wreckage of the transient life of seafarers, of sailors.

And so he started, he walked off of campus, down the street, and began a ministry, began reaching out to men whose lives were being destroyed by alcohol and transience.

Transience. He started the Yale Hope Mission. And years later, when he died, as a young missionary in Egypt, there were testimonies that came from both the rich and powerful and the down and out, declaring how this man had lived his life to know Christ and to make him known in every circumstance in life.

Some of you are students. Go read Borden of Yale. Go down to the bookstall.

Get it. If you can't afford it, just steal it. No, really. You can have it for free. Go read about his life and consider why are you here.

[23 : 33] If you're a student at one of the other universities, go read it. It's still applicable. And you know what? If you're not a student, think about this. It may not be your classmates and your campus.

It may be your workplace and your cubicle workers. It may be the other moms and the play date. It may be the friends you hang out with on Friday nights. Whatever your circumstances are, it may be the other ones. It will be your neighbors for sure.

Who do you live near? Wherever you are, this is what God has called you for. Friends, will you take up this mission? Will you figure out what your Rome is?

Having seen then clearly what the mission of God is for Paul and then for us, probably some of you are thinking, how do I get there?

What do I do? How do I? I can't do that. That's completely overwhelming. Well, friends, this is the good news of this passage. Because Paul was not only called on a mission by God as we are, but Paul saw God provide for him every step of the way and provided in surprising and a great variety of ways that some may be more common or less common but it's striking how broad and rich God's provision is for his people.

[25 : 09] These stories that we read this morning have a number of them. Let's look at a few of them quickly. The first one is that we see God displaying a supernatural power on behalf of Paul and his ministry.

Right? This incredible scene with the viper. Right? Paul's, it's such an odd story, isn't it? I mean, really. You're just reading along and suddenly Paul's collecting wood and there's this viper and, you know, you read the commentaries and they're like, well, there aren't any vipers on Malta today so this must not be true.

Well, you know what? 2,000 years, it's a small island with lots of people. They probably killed them all. It's not that hard. But the fact is, it seemed, as you read the narrative of verses 4 through 6, the natives saw the viper and they knew Paul had been bitten and he's going to die.

Right? So they knew there were poisonous snakes on the island and they knew exactly how bad it was. And Luke doesn't even bother to explain it very much.

He didn't say, and God shone a light upon Paul and there was a great display of light and angels. None of that. He just says, and Paul shook the snake into the fire and it burned up.

[26 : 31] And they all waited for him to die and he didn't. And the testimony to these natives, the word here, natives, it's so easy for that to have a pejorative sense.

It originally just meant people who weren't Greek speaking. So that's all it means. The Maltese had their own culture and language and it was not like a barbaric or backwards society.

But they did have their own beliefs and superstitions. And they believed, oh, the viper came out. Clearly our God is bringing justice on this unrighteous man.

And God uses even that misunderstanding about the nature of the spiritual world and turns it on its head. And suddenly Paul is justified before them and his ministry is exalted.

Now he still has to clarify just like he did in some other seasons in Acts. Look, I'm not a God but I serve the true and the living God who has delivered me today just as he's delivered me from so many other things so that I might tell you about Christ.

[27 : 41] And then he gets this great hospitality, walks into this man's house and his father-in-law is sick and he probably had something called Maltese fever which was a unique disease that was caused from the milk of goats on that island that was discovered in the 20th century and therefore eradicated but before then this bug got in and it killed people.

Fever and dysentery were sort of descriptors of this thing that still existed for a long time after that. And Paul walks in and he prays and he's healed.

And strikingly if you're a student of the big arc of the Luke-Acts narrative that Luke has written for us to know in Luke 4 Jesus walks into Peter's house and heals Peter's mother-in-law.

Here Paul walks in and heals another man's father. But they're strikingly different because Jesus comes in and he says I'm going to do this so that you will know who I am.

But when Paul walks in he says I'm going to do this and I'm going to pray to God so that you know what kind of God I serve. And there's this striking distinction between those two things.

[29 : 02] And in the middle of what do we see? We see Paul we see God overturning the natural order of things. Poison usually kills. Maltese fever usually dies.

And yet the God who Paul serves is a God who brings life. And the message that he brings is one of eternal life. And so these supernatural things happen so that Paul's message is vindicated and so that people will listen to him.

Friends do we look for God to work in supernatural ways today? I think it's so easy for us to deny that he does this or to think well he doesn't do it on my timetable so I'm just not going to believe in that because I don't want to be disappointed.

Friends God has and God is doing works like this today to validate the ongoing spread of the mission the message of Jesus Christ and him crucified.

God continues to do these things today in our world. But friends I also want us to make sure that we don't look for supernatural things only in these most overt and obvious ways.

[30 : 18] as I have thought about this friends is not forgiving someone who has deeply hurt you or resisting a temptation to fill the hungry hole in your heart with some worldly promise of fulfillment or simply acting kindly to someone where you will gain no benefit from it.

Are these not also supernatural? Are these not also things that do not happen outside of the work of God in our lives? So friends let us not sit and wait for God to part the Red Sea when he actually simply wants to make us patient instead.

Both of them are supernatural in God's work in our lives. And we need to embrace a broad view of how God works to help us. He comes alongside of us and enables us to do this.

So we see God's supernatural work helping Paul and helping us in our mission. The second thing we see is the kindness of strangers. I love verse two.

The native people showed us unusual kindness. The original actually reads showed us no small kindness which is a beautiful way of saying we were overwhelmed. It was abundant in the kindness.

[31 : 54] And remember where we started. These guys have just been shipwrecked on an unknown island. They might have expected bears and wolves or unhappy natives armed with spears and swords who want to imprison them, who want to attack them, who feel threatened by them.

They might have expected all sorts of things. But they're with Paul and Paul's with God and God is watching over them.

And so they have this incredible provision from the natives on the island and the head man, the most important person takes them in and welcomes them and treats them richly.

And you see even at the end of that part of the story in verse 10. When we went to put out to sea, they gave us everything we needed. And friends, these aren't people who have believed in Jesus. These are not, this is not the church coming alongside. These are people who still believe in the God of justice, who still willingly and embrace jumping onto a ship with the twin gods of Castor and Pollux on the front, believing that having those gods on the front will save them from shipwreck.

[33 : 22] The people that God used to help Paul and to encourage him are not the people you might have expected. And yet, God is there.

God has provided for Paul to get him back on his journey, to get back on the boat through the kindness of strangers.

They have all they need for the ship, for the sail ahead. I remember after my freshman year in college, I went on a missions trip to India.

Some friends, some friends' parents were leading the trip. We arrived in Delhi at 11 o'clock at night expecting to connect from Delhi to fly to Bombay where we were then going to be met by people we had never seen before who were going to take us to the place that we were actually going to settle in for five weeks and do some ministry in the name of Jesus.

We got to Delhi and the plane was cancelled. And if you've ever been in a circumstance like this it's not just it was cancelled and there's this nice person who speaks perfect English who's saying and we would like to take care of you and help you rebook your flights in the most convenient and easy way so that you can get to your destination as quickly as possible.

[34 : 46] No it is bewildering and confusing and you think how in the world do I get from where I am now to where I need to be in a timely manner and we had no idea we didn't understand the systems it was 1130 at night all the offices were closed down I mean we we slept in the airport that night which was a lot of fun but you know what happened along the way George happened that's all I could tell you his name is George and God looked at us he walked up to the leaders of our group and said maybe I can help you he got us in the right lines he got us he did the negotiation which included new fees and things like that he got us our plane tickets and helped us get on the plane to

the destination the next morning we called him George the angel there was no reason he needed to take care of us except the kindness of strangers by which

God helped us get to where we were going to do the work that he had called us to do friends when you're stuck do you ask God to help when you hit those points where you think I don't know what to do do you start looking for God to intervene because he does and he will let us not fall into our self reliance I'm going to fix this American mode but let us live instead by faith believing that the God who has called us on this mission will also provide for us all that we need in every circumstance to do what he has called us to do and then finally friends when you look at verses 11 through 16 you think why is this here it's just like a little travelog and then we went to here and then we went to here and finally we got to Rome this whole section could have just said and then we sailed to Rome and then we be done right but what is it in this last section that we see the encouragement of brothers isn't it striking not only the kindness of strangers who don't know this God but the encouragement of brothers they came from Rome they traveled out of the city into the province of Rome which is why you see it in verses 14 and 16 they entered into the province and then they were headed towards Rome and these brothers came out and do you see Paul do you see what he says verse 14 15 on seeing them Paul thanked God and took courage he knew that this was another provision from the Lord these brothers have come to encourage us as we finish this journey and he was strengthened he was encouraged by it friends

I wonder if you viewed coming to church this morning like that I get to worship with brothers and sisters what an incredible gift from the Lord I am weary I am tired this has been a long journey I need my brothers and sisters to remind me and to encourage me and to help me on the way for those of you who are starting your year at the university I implore you make this your commitment do not forsake the fellowship of believers there is no assignment done there is no extracurricular activity that is worth losing the fellowship of being a part of a local church now

I'm speaking to the university crowd because it's the beginning of school year but friends I know there are many out you who are not a part of that who are also thinking why do I go to church it's so hot the preacher goes on so long why am I here seriously I just come in I go out is this really what I want friends I want to tell you as one of the primary ways for us to pursue the mission that he's called us to we can't do it alone we truly can't I can't tell you how much being here was an encouragement to me in the weeks and months after Brandy went to be with the Lord in January I needed to be here even when

[40 : 03] I was completely overwhelmed even when I didn't have the energy to stay and to fellowship and to interact even when I couldn't sing to be here with you all was such an encouragement to me and I needed to be here and friends I will say that part of the reason why I knew I needed to be here is because I had done it for so long if you give up the habit now when the storms of life do come you will find yourself alone and adrift so now make it a commitment make it a priority do not despise this gift from God but treasure it because friends the God who has called us on this mission is the God who will provide for us because this is the very nature of the message and the gospel that we believe

God has called us on a mission because he first came on a mission for us Jesus came not to be served but to serve and to give his life he came to give himself as a ransom for many he came as a mission not to do his own will but to do the will of his father who had sent him and he now is our provision friends if you think God has abandoned you if you think you can't do it go back to the very beginning go back to the very heart of the cross Jesus came and lived a perfect life that we could not live so that he might offer himself up as a perfect sacrifice to take the penalty for the sin of our imperfect lives of our rebellion of our casting off

God over and over again and exalting ourselves to the center of our lives Jesus is the perfect provision to save us from God's wrath against our sin and to bring us into a new life and a new relationship with him and in Christ all the other things in our lives take on a new meaning and a purpose and so our studies and our relationships and our children and our work and our play and our rising up and our sleeping all of these things become renewed with a purpose to bring glory to God and they are endued with a mission that in all of these things we have an opportunity to proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into light so friends thank God thank God for this great provision and take courage let's pray Lord we praise you this morning for you have provided for us all that we need in Christ we have the greatest treasure we have the savior that we didn't even know that we needed we have been rescued from a danger that we so want to

deny Jesus we praise you that you came to save us to rescue us God we pray I pray I pray for us as a church that we would embrace your call of mission on our lives and Lord as we begin to take steps to live that out in the coming days and weeks and months God that we would do that trusting in your provision knowing that you are with us Lord knowing that the cost may be high but that the reward is great we thank you and we praise you in Jesus name amen we owe