

Dr. Robert Peterson, The Theology of Luke-Acts Session 17, Peterson, The Church in Acts, Part 4, Paul in Prison but the Gospel; I. H. Marshall, 1) God's Purpose in History, 2) Mission and Message

This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on the theology of Luke-Acts. This is session 17, Peterson, The Church in Acts, Part 4, Paul in Prison, But the Gospel. I, Howard Marshall, 1) God's Purpose in History, 2) Mission and Message.

Father, bless us, we pray, as we study your Word and its teaching, in Jesus' holy name, amen. Luke in theology, book of Acts, my own New Testament people of God in Acts, point nine, Paul in prison, but the gospel is not bound, Acts 28. Luke 28 we found was very important, and it is the same for the last chapter of the book of Acts, which is neglected.

Acts 28, let me grab the context starting at verse 17. After three days, Paul called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, brothers, though I have, I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case.

But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, though I had no charge to bring against my nation. For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain. And they said to him, we've received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you, but we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against.

I should have read the verse immediately preceding, and when we came into Rome, Acts 28:16, Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier who guarded him. Jumping down to Acts 28 23, when they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening, he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus, both from the law of Moses and from the prophets.

And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement, quote, the Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet, quote,

Isaiah six, go to this people and say, you will indeed hear, but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can hardly barely hear, and with their eyes, they have closed, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear at their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.

Isaiah six, nine, and ten. Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles. They will listen. 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.

Leaving Malta, the apostolic band headed for Rome, which they reached after several stops and some land travel. Luke wrote, quote, when we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself with the soldier who guarded him. Acts 28:16.

Paul could not attend synagogue as was his custom, but he was permitted to have visitors, so he turned his two-year imprisonment into an evangelistic opportunity. Three days after arriving, he called Jewish leaders, and when they arrived, he proclaimed his innocence of charges against Judaism, which the Romans had confirmed. Paul explained that when the Jews had protested, he had appealed to Caesar.

Verses 17 and 19. He was straightforward with his Jewish visitors in Rome. Quote, verse 20, for this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain.

Bach highlights Paul's words. Quote, what is important to note is that it is Israel's story that is still being told, even at the end of the two volumes, Luke and Acts. Israel's story of hope is also the world's story of hope.

This is where Luke's eschatology takes us to the kingdom of God and to Jesus as its Messiah. Close. Quote, Bach, A Theology of Luke and Acts, page 403.

The Jewish leaders told Paul they had not received communication concerning him from fellow Jews in Judea. Referring to Christianity, they express a desire to hear his views because people everywhere are speaking against this sect. Verse 22.

Many Jews came to hear what Paul had to say, and for a whole day, he taught them about the kingdom of God. Specifically, verse 23, from morning till evening, he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus, both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. Verse 23.

Consequently, some believed in Christ, and some did not. They disagreed among themselves and left when Paul quoted Isaiah's strong words concerning the unbelief of the Israelites in his day. Acts 28:24 through 27.

And thus implied, as Marshall noted, quote, like father, like children. Close quote, Marshall, Acts 4:24. Paul cites the words God gave Isaiah to say to the rebellious Israelites.

And Marshall says, like father, like children. Paul concluded his words to the Jews thus, Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles. They will listen.

Verse 28. Paul thus had followed his pattern of sharing the gospel, first to the Jews and also first to the Jews and also to the Greeks. Romans 1:16.

The past tense is significant. Salvation has been sent. The apostles not merely predicting a work of God among the Gentiles, for quote, Paul here confirms the sending of salvation to the Gentiles is an accomplished historical fact.

David Peterson, Acts of the Apostles, page 718. Luke concludes the book of Acts by reporting that Paul remained for two years under house arrest. He welcomed many visitors boldly and freely, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching them about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verses 30 and 31. Paul's focus during this Roman imprisonment thus was on Jesus as the Messiah, the hope of Jewish expectation. Therefore, he evangelized the Jewish visitors, showing Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament message.

He did not hesitate to condemn unbelief in Jesus as Isaiah had condemned unbelief in God in his day. Paul also did not hesitate to tell the Jewish leaders that God had sent the message of salvation to the Gentiles who are responding to it. Luke summarized Paul's message as one centered on God's spiritual rule.

Note the inclusion of kingdom in verses 23 and 31 of Acts 28. 23, Paul testified to the kingdom of God. 23, and 31, the very last verse, proclaiming the kingdom of God.

It's an inclusion. The same concept, even the same words are at both ends of the passage, unifying it around the theme. In this case, the rule, the reign, the kingdom of God.

Verses 23 and 31 of Acts 28. Luke summarized Paul's message as one centered on God's spiritual rule, the kingdom, and Christology. Larkin is correct.

“More than just a shorthand way of referring to the gospel message, the kingdom of God was the eschatological highway into the heart of the pious Jew. And the good news was that God's reign was in their midst in the victorious life, death, and resurrection exaltation of Messiah Jesus and his salvation blessings.” Larkin Acts, page 388.

More than just a shorthand referring to the gospel message. Acts 1:3, 8:12, 19:8, 25, 28:31. More than just a shorthand way of referring to the gospel message.

Acts 1:3, 8:12, 19:8, chapter 20, verse 5, 28:31. The kingdom of God was the eschatological highway into the heart of the pious Jew. Luke 13:28-29, Luke 14:15, 19:11, 23:42-51, and Acts 1:6.

Repeating those verses. Luke 13:28-29, Luke 14:15, Luke 19:11, 23:42-51, and Acts 1:6. The last passage in Acts offers helpful instruction concerning the New Testament people of God.

At least three points are noteworthy. First, Acts is about the kingdom of God, the gospel, and Jesus. Paul seeks to convince his Jewish visitors that Jesus is the Messiah from the Old Testament, showing the unity between the Testaments.

These three ideas overlap considerably in Acts and define the church. Believers, therefore, are, in light of the three motifs, God's kingdom, we are subjects of God's kingdom. The gospel, we are believers in the gospel.

Jesus, we are lovers of him who died for us and reigns at God's right hand. Believers, therefore, are subjects of God's kingdom, believers in the gospel, and lovers of him who died for them and reigns at God's right hand. Second, therefore, Acts, from beginning to end, impresses us with the importance of evangelism.

From the beginning, Acts 1:8, you'll receive the Spirit and be my witnesses from Judea to the ends of the earth. Acts 28:23, from morning to evening, Paul tried to convince them about Jesus from the law of Moses and the prophets. And then the very last word in the book of Acts proclaims the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, therefore, Acts, from beginning to end, Acts 1:8, Acts 28:23, and 31, impresses us with the importance of evangelism. Luke ends his gospel with an open-ended conclusion with Paul under house arrest in Rome for two years, 28:30, two whole years, ESV. Luke thus invites the first readers and all the following ones to believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

Acts 16:31, Paul and Barnabas's words to the Philippian jailer. Acts 16:31, Paul invites all readers, including the first ones, to believe in the Lord Jesus and be saved.

Disciples of Jesus, like the 12, have the responsibility and privilege of being fishers of men, Luke 5:10, sharing the gospel with those who don't know the Lord.

Third, believers in the West, who sometimes put comfort over suffering for the gospel, need the wise words of Ajith Fernando, a Sri Lankan evangelical evangelist. His faithful service for Christ in a culture very different from ours enables him to see biblical truths that we too easily miss. I taught for many years with Nelson Jennings, a missiologist, who taught me many things by his words and by his example.

One of the things he taught me is we need the whole church to help us understand the word of God because people in different cultures and contexts living for Christ understand the scriptures message that's really there and apply it in ways that we sometimes don't see because we are in a different cultural context. We need the whole church to adequately understand the word of God as God intended. Reflecting on Paul's submission to God's sovereignty while suffering and serving Christ, Fernando writes in his commentary on Acts, "evangelism thrives under the shadow of sovereignty."

The depth and effectiveness of Paul's ministry was greatly enhanced by his mingling of deprivation, sovereignty, and obedience. When you add to that the operation of the sovereign God who can turn tragedies into triumphs, you realize that deprivation is not something to fear but an occasion for God to express his glory. Fernando, NIV application commentary on Acts page 629.

It's easy for me to say who's never experienced deprivation. Amazing, hard, and yet faithfully, Fernando says those words. He has experienced deprivation in taking the gospel to Sri Lankan cities.

Fourth, Paul's experience in Acts 28 underscores the fact, as he wrote in Second Timothy, quote, remember the Lord, remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead and descended from David according to my gospel for which I suffered to the point of being bound like a criminal, but the word of God is not bound. Second Timothy verses eight and nine. I thought it was Second Timothy 2.

It is Second Timothy two, eight, and nine. Ben Witherington III's words serve as a summary of Acts 28, and in fact, the whole book of Acts. "Luke's main concern is to leave the reader a reminder about the unstoppable word of God which no obstacle, no shipwreck, not poisonous, not shipwreck, not poisonous snakes, not Roman authorities could hinder from reaching the heart of the empire and the hearts of those who dwelled there. It is the same message and mission that galvanizes the church today, giving it its marching orders and calling us to emulate the behavior of like of those like Paul who spoke boldly and freely, believing no external obstacle was too great for the God who raised Jesus to overcome in saving the world." Witherington, Acts of the Apostles, pages 815 and 816.

That concludes my nine motifs describing the people of God in the book of Acts. We move now to Howard Marshall's outstanding commentary on the book of Acts, specifically to his treatment of the theology of Acts under several headings. Let me just give an overview of those.

God's purpose in history, the continuation of God's purpose in history, number one. Number two, the mission, the mission and the message. Number three, progress despite opposition.

Fourth, the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God. That theme has reverberated through our concern for the theology of Acts. And last, the life and organization of the church.

Howard Marshall has given us so many helpful writings specializing in the pastoral epistles on which he wrote a huge commentary, the gospel of Luke, and the book of Acts concerning what he's written commentaries and many other things he has written as well. Theology of Acts, Howard Marshall, Acts. Although we emphasize that Luke wrote a historical narrative about the beginnings of Christianity and we reject the idea that he wrote to put over a particularly particular theological point of view, we must nevertheless ask about the nature of the theological outlook, which comes to expression in Acts.

There's no doubt that Luke sees the story as having theological significance and that he has brought out its significance in the way in which he tells it. This is, of course, something different from saying he has reinterpreted the history by presenting it in an alien theological framework. Another book of Marshall's is Luke, historian and theologian, in which he argues that Luke was both of those things.

He was an ancient historian like Thucydides and Polybius, who strive strove for accuracy. It is true. Other ancient historians made up whole scenarios, made up speeches out of thin air, and so forth.

But Polybius did not do that. He, in fact, set forth his canons of history and tried to adhere to them, not always perfectly, but he did not invent speeches and so forth. Now, Luke summarized speeches in the book of Acts in his own words, but he did not invent stuff out of thin air.

He presents the Book of Acts as history. So, Luke's a historian, but he's not only a historian; he's also a historian and a theologian. He emphasizes particular aspects of the history of Acts, as we have already seen with the help of F.F. Bruce, Dennis Johnson, and my own notes on the church in Acts.

He emphasizes certain aspects of history to communicate Christian theology. And the first point, as every writer we have talked about, including Bach, whose name I'll include in the list I just gave, says God's purpose in history is really paramount as an overriding idea undergirding the book of Acts, the continuation of God's purpose in history. The story recorded in Acts, Marshall writes, is seen as standing in continuity with the mighty acts of God recorded in the Old Testament and with the ministry of Jesus.

The phrase which has become current in theological jargon to express this characteristic is salvation history. In this context, the phrase refers to an understanding of the various events in the life of Jesus and the early church as historical actions in which the activity of God himself is revealed. Of course, God is the Lord of all history.

But in the history of Israel and the history of Christ and the Christian church in the New Testament, God reveals himself in this history. Christian faith is directed toward the God who has revealed himself as Savior on the stage of history. This understanding of faith is sometimes compared with an existentialist view, according to which faith is essentially independent of historical facts.

Well, we're told it doesn't matter whether those things happened or not, they are recorded, perhaps some historical truth, but also some mythological elements. It's not important. The main thing is the message that they convey.

To that we say, along with Marshall, wrong. To say it was basically an existential message means it was a proclamation of God's salvation with little or no backing from history and demanding faith and obedience from the hearers. Lucidus claimed transformed this message into a historical report about Jesus and thus made the story of Jesus into part of an ongoing set of acts in history, which had originally been the end of history and now became the middle of history.

This is the thesis of Hans Conzelmann's book on the theology of acts. Marshall says, this is a misinterpretation of the evidence. There never was an existential message independent of history, but rather the kind of presentation of salvation history offered by Luke was the original understanding of Christianity.

To contrast the salvation historical and existentialist approaches is to produce a false antithesis. The truth is rather that the historical facts in which God was seen to be active demand an existential response of commitment and obedience to God. Apart from these historical facts, there can be no basis of faith.

This does not mean that Christian faith is faith in certain events or that faith is possible only if certain events can be proved to have taken place and to have been

the acts of God. It does mean that if the reality of the events is denied, then there's no basis for faith. Acts 15:17, 1 Corinthians, sorry, 1 Corinthians 15:17.

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 1 Corinthians 15:17. The Lord used two things to draw me to himself as a 21-year-old who had been pointed to the word of God by a godly man with whom I worked in the summer as I was going to college, by a godly man who was going to seminary.

One was the doctrine of the Trinity in Paul. I saw it all over the place, and I said, how foolish to invent something like this. No, this must be the way the living God has always been because it's mysterious, and it would be a stumbling block to invent something like this.

No, God always has been the Holy Trinity and especially Paul reveals it many times in the substratum of what he writes. He's not even focusing on the Trinity, but his letters are Trinitarian. The other thing that really God used to prick my heart was the honesty of 1 Corinthians 15 where the apostle says, if Christ has not been raised, these things would obtain.

We are false witnesses of Christ. We're a bunch of fools devoting our lives to a message that is just a fairy tale, and what Marshall just quoted, the preaching is vain, your faith is vain, your faith is futile if Christ has not been raised and you are still in your sins. Of course, directly after that, in 1 Corinthians 15, I think it's verse 20, Paul says, but Christ has been raised, the firstborn from the dead, and he compares him to Adam and so forth, arguing that Jesus resurrection is the basis for the resurrection of the people of God, which is the ultimate Christian hope.

History is important. The theology of the Bible is based upon God, the living God acting in history. As Carl Henry said many years ago, he is the God who acts and he is the God who speaks as well and his revelation is deed word revelation.

God acts in the exodus, in the resurrection of Jesus, in the pouring out of the spirit of Pentecost and he speaks to interpret his acts. A number of important facets of this basic point must be noted. First, the events recorded in Acts are seen as being brought about by the will and purpose of God.

The story of the death and resurrection of Jesus is the most obvious example of an event which is traced to quote, the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, Acts 2, 23. But the same is true of the events in the life of the church. Thus, it is implied, for example, that the opposition which the church experienced was of the same character as a divinely foretold opposition to Jesus, Acts 4:27 through 29.

It follows secondly, that the life of the church was regarded as taking place in fulfillment of scripture. The prophecies made in the Old Testament govern the course

of church history, the outpouring of the spirit, and the proclamation of salvation, Acts 2:17 to 21. The mission to the Gentiles, Acts 13:47, and their incorporation in the church, Acts 15:16 to 18, and the refusal of the Jews as a whole to respond to the gospel, Acts 28:25 to 27.

Thirdly, the life of the church was directed by God at crucial stages. Sometimes the spirit directed the church, what to do, 13 to 15, 28:16, 6. At other times, angels spoke to Christian missionaries, 5:19 and 20:8, 26, 27: 23, or messages were mediated by prophets, 11:28, 20:11, and 12. On occasion, the Lord himself appeared to his servants, 18:9, and 23:11.

Fourthly, the power of God was seen in signs and wonders which were performed by the name of Jesus. Acts 3, 16 and 14, 3. As a result, the work of the Christian mission can be said to be carried out by God. Concerning the inseparability of history and theology in both Luke and Acts, but in terms of Acts, Marshall has just underscored four points.

The events in Acts are brought about by the will and purpose of God. Two, they're the fulfillment of scripture. Three, God directs the life of the church in different ways.

Fourth, sometimes, he brings signs and wonders along with the apostolic message. Two, the mission and the message. Acts is a book about mission.

It is not unfair to take Acts 1:8 as a summary of its contents. You'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth. Close quote.

The purpose of the Christian church was to bear witness to Jesus. This was, in a special sense, the task of the 12 who had been with Jesus during his earthly ministry and had seen him rise from the dead, chapter 1, verses 21 and 22, and was therefore especially equipped to bear witness about Jesus to Israel. But the task was by no means confined to the 12.

And many other Christians took their share in evangelism. The message which was proclaimed is expounded in a series of public addresses scattered throughout the book. Broadly speaking, it was concerned with the fact that Jesus, who had been raised from the dead by God after being put to death by the Jews, had been declared to be the Jewish Messiah and the Lord, and hence the source of salvation.

It was through him that forgiveness of sins was offered to men. And it was from him that the gift of the spirit had come down to the church. The way in which Jesus functions as a savior is not made clear in Acts.

There's no very close link made between his death and the possibility of salvation, except in Acts 20:28. And the impression gained is rather that it was by virtue of

being raised from the dead and exalted by the Father that Jesus received the authority to bestow salvation and to carry out his mighty acts in the church. It is thus the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus, which stands at the center of the preaching in Acts.

The blessings associated with salvation are summed up as the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the spirit. The latter was manifested in experiences of joy and spiritual power. Acts has little to say about the Pauline experience of union with Christ.

And one might be tempted to assume that Luke's religion is less mystical. It would be more correct to say that Luke describes the same basic Christian experience as Paul in different terminology. The place given to prayer and divisions in Acts, as well as to such charismatic experiences as speaking in tongues and prophesying, indicates there is a real and profound element of communion with God in this book.

Furthermore, although it isn't explained in the conversion of Saul, who became Paul, when Jesus says, why are you persecuting me? Jesus assumes the doctrine of union with Christ. In persecuting Jesus, in persecuting Christians, Paul was persecuting their Lord to whom they were so joined that to touch the one was to touch the other. The main storyline in Acts is concerned with the spread of the message.

It begins with the existence of a small group of followers of the earthly Jesus gathered in Jerusalem and describes how, under the impact of the gift of the spirit, they become witnesses to Jesus and gathered an increasing number of converts. The early chapters portray the growth and consolidation of the group in Jerusalem. From chapter six onwards, we are conscious of widening horizons.

Many priests are converted and at the same time, the Christian witness reaches various synagogues associated with the Jewish dispersion in Jerusalem. As persecution led to the flight of many Christians from Jerusalem, so the message began to spread in the broader area of Judea and then took a decisive step forward with the conversion of some Samaritans and even a traveler from Ethiopia. By the middle of chapter nine, the author can speak of "the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria."

But with the inclusion of Samaria, the first important move has been made toward people who were not fully Jews. And soon afterwards, various events convinced the church that it was called to take the good news to non-Jews. At first, the contacts were with Gentiles who already worshiped God in the synagogues, but it could not be long before other Gentiles too were attracted by the message.

Once the church had been firmly established in Antioch, the Gentile mission became established policy. And from Antioch, a deliberate, organized mission took place. If Peter had been the leading figure in the early days of a church in Jerusalem, guiding

it from its infancy to the point where it recognized that the gospel was for the Gentiles.

So, Paul plays the leading part in the development of the mission from Antioch. The second part of Acts is essentially the story of how Paul, in cooperation with other evangelists, proceeded to establish churches in Asia Minor and Greece. So that by chapter 20, the gospel has been effectively proclaimed throughout the Eastern Mediterranean world.

Paul can speak as though his work there is complete. But we are, in fact, only at chapter 20. And there is still something like a quarter of the book to come.

What we have is an account of how Paul returned from his travels to Jerusalem and was arrested on a trumped-up charge. The story describes his various appearances between courts and governors, in the course of which he defends himself against both the Jews and the Romans, protesting his innocence and, in effect, having it confirmed by the Roman authorities. Finally, at considerable length, we have the account of his journey to Rome.

In the broad sense, it can be said that the purpose of the account is to show how the gospel in the person of Paul came to Rome. But it is clear that the story in Acts, which starts off as a story of missionary expansion, has other aims also. We must ask whether other theological elements have a place in Acts.

In our next lecture, we will indeed see that the answer to that question is a positive one. We will then begin to explore some of those other theological elements in Acts.

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