

"REFLECTIONS ON ACTS"

(Luke Ferguson)

If I had to choose a single quote from Acts to capture the theme of the book, it would be from Gamaliel the Pharisee in Chapter 5: "...[F]or if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!" (5:38-39) What could better describe what plays out in the book of Acts? In his creative sovereignty, God used seemingly disastrous events (persecution, beatings, imprisonment, unjust court proceedings, a shipwreck) to advance the message of the Gospel around the region and eventually the world.

So when the apostles ask Jesus in Chapter 1: "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?", after reading through the book of Acts (and certainly with the benefit of knowing what has transpired in the last two millennia), it seems like their question about a political reign was so small. In the book of Acts alone, we see the message of redemption proclaimed to numerous synagogues, the Jewish council (Ch. 7), a pagan magician (Ch. 8), a queen's official (Ch. 8), a persecutor of believers (Ch. 9), a God-fearing centurion (Ch. 10), a proconsul (Ch. 13), worshipers of Zeus and Hermes (Ch. 14), "legalists" (Ch. 15), a businesswoman who worshiped God (Ch. 16), a Philippian jailer (Ch. 16), Epicurean and Stoic philosophers (Ch. 17), riotous Jews (Ch. 22) a governor (Ch. 24) and a king. (Ch. 26) Some mocked. Some merely heard. And consistent with God's inscrutable and eternal plan, "as many as were appointed to eternal life believed". (13:48) And those stories paved the way for everything that God has done since Acts 28 to reach the world with the good news.

I have questions too: "Lord, will you at this time intervene, heal, fix, reveal.....?" And maybe many of them are based on a healthy desire for brokenness to end and death to be swallowed up. But until that Day comes, I can see in Acts that God uses the worst of circumstances to spread the Gospel and to move closer to the culmination of his plan. Paul submitted to this reality and boldly declared, "I am not only ready to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." (21:13)

And Paul's poignant words in Chapter 27 seem to reach beyond the immediate dilemma of his stormy trip: "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." (27:10) During his tumultuous voyage through the book of Acts, Paul repeatedly showed himself willing to suffer loss and to die for the sake of the Gospel. What am I willing to do?

