

September 2, 2018

Church Planting
That's All, Folks!
Acts 28:17-22

Opening words: A.W. Tozer once wrote, *"I remind you that there are churches so completely out of the hands of God that if the Holy Spirit withdrew from them, they wouldn't find it out for many months."* That quote makes me ask you these questions: How long do you think it would take for us to discover the Holy Spirit had withdrawn from Western Reserve? Would the Holy Spirit's exit be an instant discovery? Would the Holy Spirit's exit be a slow erosion? How many would never notice the Holy Spirit was gone? Do you think the Holy Spirit left Western Reserve years ago? Do you think the Holy Spirit was ever here? Do you think the Holy Spirit is with us today?

I have read that quote to you and asked you those questions countless times during this sermon series, *Church Planting*. I have been preaching through the Book of Acts during the summer months since 2013. Why spend so much time on the Book of Acts? My reason was simple. I wanted to reconnect with the Holy Spirit and Acts is the testimony of the Holy Spirit. This is the truth: My time in the ministry has been dominated by various church growth principles, because during my time in the ministry the mainline Protestant church has been dying. However, those principles alone are not enough. We need the Holy Spirit to experience revival. Without the Holy Spirit, we have no future. Without the Holy Spirit, we have no church. Today, I will finish this sermon series. I hope we are more familiar with the Holy Spirit now, than we were in 2013. This is sermon number sixty-four. For this reason, I have called this message *That's All Folks!* Maybe I should have called it *How Deep is Your Love?*

Acts 28:17-22 Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. ¹⁸ They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. ¹⁹ The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. ²⁰ For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain."
²¹ They replied, "We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. ²² But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect."

Influential German scholar Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) once said, *"To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering."* I find that quote to be a little dark, but that was Nietzsche. He was a dark character. However, I can't say it is

completely wrong. Just think about it for a moment. We sacrifice the most for the people we love the most. If you will admit there is some truth in that quote, say, **"Amen!"**

We find ourselves today in the twenty-eighth chapter of Acts. The end has finally come. This is the last passage I will look at in this series. Obviously, much has already happened. Let me summarize the book for you one more time. I am being repetitive so you will remember the story. It all began with Jesus ascending, and the Holy Spirit descending on the original eleven disciples. Once Matthias was selected to replace Judas Iscariot, Acts tells of the evangelistic work of the disciples, now Apostles. Once Saul is converted, the focus of the entire book shifts to him. With his new passion, Saul becomes Paul. He is determined to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ, so he goes on three missionary journeys. Each one was longer than the one before. One day, he hears how the believers in Jerusalem were struggling, so he begins to collect a love offering to help. He returned to the Golden City with the money, but he wasn't welcomed. Everyone seemed to be against him. The Jewish Christians were against him for demoting the Old Testament law. The Jewish community was against him for promoting the resurrection of Jesus. He had done nothing wrong, but he was arrested and incarcerated for his own protection. In time, even the Roman authorities were against him because he was causing them more work. Paul's only saving grace was his citizenship. As a Roman citizen, Paul had the right to have his case heard in Rome. His trip to Rome was difficult. On that journey, Paul found himself in the middle of a great storm and was shipwrecked on the island of Malta. Last week, we talked about how Paul traveled from Malta to Rome itself. That is where we find Paul today.

According to the very first verse in our reading, Paul requests the leaders of the Jewish community to assemble. Once assembled, Paul begins to tell his story. He says it clearly, he did nothing wrong! He did nothing to harm the present-day Jewish community. He did nothing to harm the legacy of the Jewish faith. However, his innocence did not seem to matter. He was arrested and handed over to the Roman authorities. After a thorough investigation, the Roman authorities discover what Paul has been saying all along. He did nothing wrong! The Romans wanted to release him, but the Jews objected. Paul requested to be sent to Rome for a simple reason. His goal was not to find justice; his goal was to take the Good News of Jesus Christ to the empire's capital. Listen to what I am about to say. The driving force in his life was to proclaim the Gospel to the corners of this world. How much is Paul willing to sacrifice to proclaim the Gospel? Paul was willing to sacrifice everything. If you do not believe me, then look at verse twenty. It says, *"It is because of this hope of Israel that I am bound to this chain."* Those chains represented all the suffering Paul endured in his life for the Gospel. This is the question that must be answered:

Why was Paul willing to suffer and sacrifice for the Gospel? It is an easy question to answer. The answer is not that Paul liked to travel. The answer is not that Paul would receive a cash prize at the end. The answer is not that he was being blackmailed. The

answer is, Paul loved Jesus and he understood what Jesus did for him. Thanks to Jesus, his past sins were forgiven. Thanks to Jesus, his future was bright. He knew he was going to heaven. Thanks to Jesus, his life in this world had purpose. In short, Paul knew because of Jesus he had life abundantly, both in this world and the next. The question is not, if Paul loved Jesus. The question is, do you love Jesus? That leads us to an interesting question. How much are you willing to sacrifice and suffer for Jesus? If that question makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

One of the great minds of twentieth century theology was Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945). He was a Lutheran pastor, and a theologian. However, history remembers him as an anti-Nazi dissident. He got involved with a plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) and was executed for that crime on April 9, 1945. The piece of his theology that haunts me is something called "*Cheap Grace*." He said, cheap grace happens when people want the benefits of being a Christian without any sacrifice or suffering. In other words, we want to go to heaven, but we don't want to change anything about ourselves. We want to go to heaven, but we don't want to experience any discomfort. Do you know of anyone who is guilty of cheap grace? Are you guilty of cheap grace? To answer that last question, let me ask you these revealing questions to help you answer that larger question.

How much of your free time are you willing to sacrifice for the Gospel? That is a loaded question, because time is such a complex thing. You can't buy more time. Every day, everyone is given 1,440 minutes. I would like to say we are free to decide how we are going to spend our 1,440 minutes, but I do not want to lie to you. How many of your 1,440 minutes are predetermined for you? For example, each one of us is required to get so much sleep to remain healthy. Each one of us goes to work to pay for our expenses. The actual amount of free time in your life is very small. How you spend your free time is very revealing. We only spend our limited free time on the things that are the most important to us. With that in mind, let me ask you these three questions.

How much of your free time do you spend practicing the spiritual disciplines? You remember them. There is prayer, fasting, Bible study, meditation, worship, seeking forgiveness, reflection, and submission. Each one draws you closer to God. How much of your free time do you spend practicing the spiritual disciplines?

How much of your free time do you spend on the betterment of the church? That is a significant question in this size church, because so much of what we do is volunteer driven. We simply can't afford to hire the work out. Do you remember the 90/10 principle? Are you part of the 10% who does 90% of the work? Or, are you part of the 90% who does 10% of the work? How much of your time do you spend on the betterment of the church?

How much of your free time do you spend on the betterment of your community? Our community, region, nation and world are filled with struggling people. They have done

nothing wrong, but are victims of Satan's cruel games. I am not talking about improving the lives of animals, and I love animals. I am talking about improving the lives of human beings. How much of your free time do you spend on the betterment of your community? This is the general question: How much of your free time are you willing to sacrifice for the Gospel? Paul sacrificed everything for the Gospel because he loved Jesus. How much do you love Jesus? How deep is your love? If that makes you think, then say, "**Amen!**" That leads us to the next question.

How much of your money are you willing to sacrifice for the Gospel? The Biblical standard for giving is a tithe. The baseline for Christian giving is 10%. I believe, sacrificial giving is more than 10%. This is the sad truth: The average churchgoer gives only 2% of their annual income to the church. That means churches do not have a spending problem. That means people have a giving problem. Do you remember the 90/10 principle? Are you the part of the 10% who gives 90% of the money to this church? Or, are you part of the 90% who gives 10% of the money to this church? I am never ashamed to talk about money because money is important and money is limited, so money is revealing. How much of your money are you willing to sacrifice for the Gospel? Paul sacrificed everything because he loved Jesus. How much do you love Jesus? How deep is your love? If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**"

So, we end this long sermon series with the Apostle Paul in Rome. He has summoned the Jewish community together and tells them he did nothing wrong! Yet, despite his innocence, Paul is in chains. Those chains are symbolic of all the suffering and sacrificing Paul did for the Gospel. He endured the suffering for one reason. Paul loved Jesus. We are no different. We are willing to sacrifice and suffer for those we love too. Love is why Jesus sacrificed and suffered for us. May we never forget Jesus loves us! You know the story.

Jesus did nothing wrong! Yet, after the Seder, Jesus was arrested. He was tried first by the leaders of his own faith. They found him guilty, but they lacked the authority to execute him. For this reason, they sent him to the Roman authorities. They ordered his execution to appease the ugly crowd. Jesus was executed on a Friday afternoon between two criminals. The crowd that cheered him on the previous Sunday had scattered. The only ones who remained were the ones who loved him the most. You know how the story ends. Jesus conquers death and walks out of the tomb. It is somewhat natural. We rush to the resurrection of Jesus, because the suffering of Jesus makes us uncomfortable. The Roman Catholic tradition is symbolized by the crucifix because they want to remind their membership how Jesus suffered for them. That is important because it is in his suffering that we discover the depth of his love for us. It is human nature. We always suffer and sacrifice for the people we love the most. Do you remember the words of Friedrich Nietzsche? He once said, "*To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering.*" Don't miss the meaning behind Jesus's suffering. The reason is obvious. He loves you. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"