

Title: The Hope of Israel is the hope of the world.  
Text: Acts 28.11-23  
Theme: The expansion of the gospel (in spite of the rejection of Israel)  
Series: Acts  
Prop Stmtnt: The expansion of the gospel should have come because of Israel, not in spite of her.

Read Text:

Paul finally makes it to Rome. At the end of the book of Romans that he had earlier written to the believers in Rome, he had planned to come to this great city, but not as a prisoner. Now he was a prisoner. His trial awaits. So, the book of Acts concludes with three unresolved issues: 1) The fate of Paul in Rome. What is going to happen to him? Will he finally get justice and be freed? 2) The unfinished expansion of the gospel to the Gentiles (the rest of the world). The book of Acts begins with the commissioning of the disciples by Jesus to be witnesses of Jesus in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the rest of the world. Rome is part of the rest of the world, but it is not the rest of the world. 3) The rejection of the gospel by so many Jews. There is joy in the expansion of the gospel among the Gentiles, but there is grief at the rejection of the gospel by the Jews. When Paul arrives in a new place, he connects with fellow Jews and lays out a convincing case for embracing Jesus as the Messiah and following him. The hope of Israel is also the hope of the world. He does this here in Rome with the Jews who are willing to listen to him even though they have heard about Christianity (end of v.22 and are aware that there are plenty of people (that I take to be other Jews) who are against it.

Jerusalem is said to be the home of the 3 great monotheistic religions of the world: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This is not how it was supposed to be. Pure OT Judaism should have excitedly been ready to receive, embrace and celebrate the coming of Christ. Judaism should have then happily birthed Christianity and launched her as a global mission from Israel to the rest of the world just as a proud parent excitedly shares in the success of a child. And Christianity should humbly and gratefully look back upon Judaism as the happy home that launched her world-wide influence to expand the kingdom of God rescuing people from sin and hopelessness and giving them an eternal home through Christ. If that had been the case, it is possible that the distortion of both in the form of Islamism would never have come about. But that is speculative on my part.

There were two girls who grew up near each other on Detroit's eastside. The one girl was an only child and the other girl had many siblings. The girl with many siblings of course, had to share her clothes, her room, her toys, food, attention and her life with her siblings. She really didn't have a choice, she had to make space in her life for others. Her friend didn't and was glad she didn't. Even as a child she told her how glad she was that she didn't have any siblings so she didn't have to share anything. Those two girls stayed friends for their entire lives and both died after living rather long lives. The one who made space for her siblings lived that way, and in the many years that I knew her, she spent her days doing a lot of things for many people. The other, not so much. The child who was glad to not share her toys became an adult who preferred not to share her life and it showed. She lived and died alone.

Some are tempted to think that if there is only 1 toy, then I am the loser if I have to share it. But, when you share something that is yours with another, or better yet, when you share yourself with another, then your heart expands. The person who never shares, lives with a rather small bandwidth for love, whereas the person who shares and shares keeps experiencing an expansion of their heart. They share for the joy of others only to find that God increases their capacity for joy. The most generous people are by far the happiest and most joyful people. Therefore, can you imagine (I know not really, but try anyway) just how joyful, happy, contented, satisfied God is in his own being? After all, God loved the world! God SO loved the world that he shared, he gave (John 3.16) his Son and Jesus loved the church SO much that he gave himself up for her (Eph. 5.25). Do you see it? Do you “see what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we (we of all people) should be called the children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” (1 John 3.1) The world did not know him because the world did not want to know him because knowing him means to become like him and becoming like him means to love, really love, love others more than you love yourself. Most people want a god, a religion, a philosophy that makes much of them, that validates them, that advances them, that esteems them above all, that gives them cause to justify themselves. But why would you want a religion that makes much of you when your heart is so small when you can have Christ whose heart is so big and will make your heart to be like his? Jesus wants so much more for you than you could ever want for yourself. And that, is the tension.

All of this is set on display in this text. And here are the two points.

1. What is the hope of Israel?
2. Why is the hope of Israel the reason why Paul is wearing a chain?

This text is near the conclusion of the book of Acts. But, the conclusion of the book is still the beginning of our story which is the story of the establishment of the church, the spread of the gospel and the expansion of the kingdom of God. The latter half of the book of Acts tells of the experiences of a Jewish Christian named Paul who stepped over ethnic lines and bridged large cultural chasms in order to share the gospel. He paid for it. The fact that he was so accepting of Gentiles was offensive, but it should not have been. Paul engaged the Jews with the gospel and he engaged the Gentiles with the gospel. That is the goal of the gospel! That is what the message of the gospel does! To many of the Jews, Paul’s acceptance of the Gentiles was offensive, but Paul was accepting the Gentiles because God was accepting of them. That is what the gospel is about and that it was it accomplishes. You cannot believe the gospel consistently and be racist. The message that Paul preached was from the Jewish Scriptures. He consistently pointed out that the reaching of the Gentiles and the inclusion of Gentiles who embraced the Jewish Messiah was always the plan of God. So, let’s answer the first question.

1. **What is the hope of Israel?**

When Paul talks about the hope of Israel, he is speaking about Jesus. But, Jesus was not just the hope of Israel, he was and is the hope of the world. But these Jews did not want to share their toys with the world and their idea of a Messiah was someone who rescued them and only them, someone who came for them and only them, whereas that was never God’s plan. The only way for Israel to be rescued was for them to accept their Messiah who demanded that they accept a

message, a mission and kingdom that was also for the Gentiles. The Jews, however, tried to tell Jesus what kind of Messiah he had to be, instead of accepting what kind of people they were to be. Now, hold on to that idea, because I am going to come back to that in a second.

Jesus is the hope of Israel because Jesus fulfills the law. Israel never kept the law and showed that for over a thousand years, she couldn't keep the law. The Jewish Scriptures that the Jews loved so much were all about how they were miserable failures and were the unfaithful people of God who repeatedly violated God's covenant. There were brief moments in time when Israel as a whole was faithful to God, but those were the exceptions and not the rule. Even the best of her kings, David and Solomon were adulterers and idolaters. Why Israel wanted a Messiah who would make much of them is a misreading of their own story. The law was given to show us our need, not to give anybody a reason to boast over someone else. If you really understood the heart of the law, you understood that you could not keep it. No one ever did. No one, until Jesus. The law could not save. It could not empower anyone to be righteous. The law could point out your need, but it could not provide a lasting salvation or forgiveness. Only Jesus could do that. Jesus did what the law could not do. The OT was written with Jesus in view. Jesus is what the law pointed to and was all about.

Again, the story of Israel is the story of failure. Israel needed a prophet who would never die and would perfectly say all that she needed to hear. Israel also needed a priest. She needed an eternally perfect priest who could offer an eternally perfect sacrifice to pay for all of her sins. And, Israel needed a King. She needed a perfect King. She needed an eternally perfect King. She needed an eternally, perfect King that she could love and follow forever. God sent her Jesus. Jesus is the eternally perfect prophet, priest and King. He is the perfect prophet because he is the Word incarnate. He is the full and final expression of God. He is the perfect priest because he was perfectly innocent and never had to offer a sacrifice for his own sins, but offered up Himself as the perfect sacrifice as the once and for all final payment for every single sin of every single person who would ever believe in him. His life was that pure and his death was that sufficient that he paid it all, so that every single person whoever trusts in him is forgiven of their sin and declared righteous in his sight. He is also the perfect King who rules over all kings and all kingdoms as the One who has the right to rule and who rules rightly. He is all of these things because, before he was a man, he was and remained as God. God loves Israel AND he loves the world. God does not have to choose between the two and doesn't because God has a really big heart. Therefore, the hope of Israel is the hope of the world.

Now, we should understand that it was difficult for them, in seeing Jesus to grasp that he indeed was God. When you looked at him, you saw a human. If you listened to him, watched him eat, walk, sleep, and live, it was obvious that he was human. So, from the perspective of every person who saw Jesus when he was on the earth, they would say, of course he is human! From the perspective of all of those who saw him do all of those things, they did not have to be convinced that he was human, it was challenging for them to believe that this human was God.

From heaven's perspective, (angels in particular) they knew that of course he is God. He was their Creator. They worshiped him. They saw him in his unveiled glory. That was how they knew him, saw him, and experienced him for thousands of years. From heaven's perspective they were astounded that he became human. Wow! God has become man?! Now you can

understand why the angels showed up on the night that Christ was born and put on a concert! They were amazed God had become man.

But, for Israel, God becoming man was more than just a difficult truth to grasp. This was a concept, a category that they had not really considered as a possibility and needed some time to process. After all, the very life and ministry of Christ was all designed to bring people along a step at a time into this realization. Early in the ministry of Jesus he repeatedly told people not to spread news about him, not yet. People were not ready to hear about him because they needed to be brought along slowly. Their idea of what the Messiah was supposed to be was not fully informed by the Scriptures. They had misinterpreted somethings and Jesus was helping them to see that and correct that. And, over time, the revelation of Jesus as God was clear. There was no mistake. The teaching of Jesus combined with the miracles of Jesus combined with the life of Jesus (moral character) presented an undeniable case before any judge if the judge was unbiased. But, the judges weren't. The evidence was indisputable, but, yet, it was still rejected. Jesus was not the Messiah they wanted. The Jews were not atheists. They believed in God. But when they were presented with a completed picture of God, by Christ they rejected that.

Let's go back to that idea that, the Jews attempted to create the Messiah in their own image. They wanted a Messiah that would do what they wanted, rather than submit to being the kind of people that God demanded.

It is a pattern that continues. The biggest challenge for moral people and religious people is to admit the fact that their righteousness (or cultural identity) is not good enough. In fact, it doesn't count for anything. Our righteousness is not even righteousness. Religious people are not atheists. The Jews were not atheists. They believed in God, but they believed in God on their terms. Those terms were exposed by Jesus as being false and he presented them with a corrected view of God. The Jews, who were not ignorant of God and his word, rejected the corrected view of God and the proper interpretation of God's Word. Anyone who believes in God on his own terms or on terms that are not consistent with what God believes about himself has embraced a false belief. By the end of the book of Acts, we are presented with a very sad reality. Judaism is a false religion. People who trust in Judaism are not the people of God and will die in their sins without hope because they have rejected the only means by which they can be saved. The very people who should have embraced Jesus, rejected him and the very people who should not embrace Jesus (the Gentiles) were the ones who were accepting him.

This is rather fascinating. Given the historically contentious relationship of the Jews and Gentiles, you would think that the Gentiles would reject Jesus because he was the Jewish Messiah, but the Gentiles accepted him. The Jews on the other hand rejected their Jewish Messiah because their Messiah also came as the Savior of the World and they had no interest in sharing their "toys" with the world. But, the King is so generous and kingdom of God is so big that there is plenty to go around.

Imagine that you are an only child and your mom died and after some time passed, your dad decided to remarry. Now, you have to share your dad with his new wife and that's going to take a little getting used to. But, let's say that the woman he wanted to marry was a widow who had 15 children and now you have to share your dad with not only a new woman, but all of her kids.

But, what if that widow and her 15 children lived in a sprawling complex on the ocean that had condos, golf courses, pools, lazy rivers, firepits, outdoor kitchens and marinas, jet skis, and boats? And what if these kids loved you and invited you to share in a world with resources that could not be exhausted? The rejection of Jesus was and always is a rejection of joy. God's heart is so big and his kingdom is so glorious that his capacity for joy is endless. The fountain of our joy is endless, which means our experience of joy in God and in the people of God is a delight that will overwhelm us forever and ever. Why would you or anyone not trust in Christ? But, if following Jesus means that I have to share my toys (or share my favored nation status), then I don't want Jesus. Why not? Because my ethnicity is my justification.

Do you see it now? For most of the Jews, the hope of Israel was Israel. The hope of Israel was being Jewish. But, being Jewish doesn't count. The real hope of Israel is the hope of the world and that is Jesus because we can't justify ourselves. Only Jesus can do that. But that truth is offensive.

## **2. Why is the hope of Israel the reason why Paul is wearing a chain?**

We've established the fact that Jesus is the hope of Israel. So, what Paul is saying is that he is wearing this chain, that is, he is a prisoner charged with a crime because he is a follower of Jesus and following Jesus is considered by some to be a serious offense. That makes sense doesn't it?

Jesus himself was considered to be a serious offense. What was it that Pilate had written and put on the cross? He had posted the offense that Jesus had committed that was so heinous, so atrocious that it merited, in the eyes of man's court that the offender be punished with an astonishing amount of inhumane treatment known as crucifixion. And the offending charge was? He was, the King of the Jews. Have you ever realized that Jesus was executed for being Jesus? Jesus was executed for being Jesus because he was the King who would not change and submit to the demands of his subjects. This King could have pulled the power card and demand submission. But this King does not want a kingdom built on fear, but a kingdom built on love and joy. He is building a kingdom of people who love him because they don't love themselves. Who worship him because they don't worship themselves. Who submit to him because they do not rule themselves. Who trust in him, because they realize their own sin and therefore realize that they cannot trust in themselves.

Jesus exposes the lies of our own hearts, the failures of our religions, and the hopelessness of our governments. Therefore, to all of the proud in this world who believe in themselves to save themselves, who want their sin and want their power, Jesus is the ultimate threat and his followers are historically pursued and punished. Paul was wearing a chain because, as he said to Timothy, all those who are godly in Christ Jesus can expect persecution.

We're not done yet telling people about Jesus because we are not home yet. Here we can expect rejection and even chains. But, it won't be for long. Those who should've believed, didn't while those who shouldn't did. Privilege does not equal faith.

I want to conclude this message and this service by asking Paul and then ourselves some helpful questions:

- Why do you love and seek to reach people who have hurt you?
- Why haven't "these chains" caused you to turn inward and stop caring about your world?
- Haven't you been hurt enough?

The obvious answer is Jesus and the gospel. The death and resurrection of Christ is the grounding of our salvation, right? But the greatest expression of and greatest sacrifice made for your soul was done by the very One who was the recipient of the greatest injustice. If you are waiting for your sorrows to end before you care for others, you will never care for others.

What are "your chains"? What are the difficulties or inequities that you have experienced that have given you the occasion to stop caring for others? Is your heart cold toward others and indifferent to the needs of others because you are so focused on your burden and you don't feel like feeling again? How have you tried to shoot yourself off from others?

Lord, let me see my chains as an opportunity to know you, depend on you, become more like you and therefore, to love others from a position of weakness and even need. Help me to see the selfish ways in which I have tried to insulate myself from caring for others and have only succeeded in becoming indifferent to you. Help me to love you and then others.