

ARE YOU A PERSON GOD CAN USE?

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study
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Let's Begin

God will not be hindered. What He purposes, He will accomplish. And in carrying out His plans, He sometimes employs the most unlikely people. The Apostle Paul was one such person. Who could have thought as Paul stood watching on when Stephen was stoned to death, he would be the one to carry the Gospel – the Gospel which solicited from him such hate – to ancient Rome, and consequently to the entire known world?

However, the Book of Acts is a book of possibilities. It is a record of the Gospel unleashed. As we finish this great book, let's keep this question in mind: Are you a person God can use? God is willing to use you. Are you willing to be used by God?

Chapter 28 reveals several lessons surrounding God's work through Paul's life. Let's follow the simple outline below:

- I. Paul was a Protected Man (vv. 1-6)**
- II. Paul was a Powerful Man (vv. 7-10)**
- III. Paul was a Purposeful Man (vv. 11-22)**
- IV. Paul was a Preaching Man (vv. 23-31)**

I. Paul was a Protected Man (vv. 1-6)

Chapter 28 represents the last page of the first chapter of Christian history. Luke accomplished his purpose: to trace the growth of Christianity to the uttermost (1:8). Paul's arrival in Rome completed the outline. Christianity was now firmly planted in the heart of the ancient world. Note Luke's wording, "Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him" (v. 31). The Gospel was unhindered!

The first lesson that strikes us concerning the Apostle Paul is God's favor and protection over him. Of course, this comes as no surprise. Paul suffered many hardships we find recorded throughout the book: rescued from **D a m a s c u s**, stoned at Lystra, imprisoned in Philippi, laughed at in Athens, pressured out of Ephesus, and now, shipwrecked in the Mediterranean. In every stormy sea of life God has an island of protection for His children.

Reflection Connection

Do you live day by day on the assumption God is protecting you? Why or why not? Do you feel we take God's providential care for granted? Explain.

Reflected in these first verses is God's perpetual care for his chosen vessel, "And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness...And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand" (vv. 1-3). From one peril to the next, the Apostle Paul served the Lord Jesus.

Luke identified the Islanders as "barbarous people"; they nevertheless showed kindness to Paul and the other crewmen saved from the ship. Initially, their view of the apostle Paul was positive. But when a poisonous snake crawled from the kindling wood and bit the apostle, their religious superstitions surfaced. They assumed vengeance was being processed by an angry god (v. 4).



Waiting for Paul's knees to buckle under him, their minds quickly changed as they observed Paul's calm response, "and he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm" (v. 5). God's protection was evident upon Paul's life. Do you feel God protects you? Unless our faith remains steadily in our Lord's care for us, it is unlikely we will ever be used in a great way by God. Why?

There is a simple reason: God's man on God's mission with God's message always bears God's protection (cp. Mark 16:15-18. Luke 10:19). Know, however, God is not obligated to give providential care to irresponsible Christians outside of God's will. On the other hand, the safest place on earth is in the center of God's will (1 Pet. 3:13; Matt. 10:28; Ps. 56:4).

II. Paul was a Powerful Man (vv. 7-10)

God's protection was clearly evident in Paul's life. No less evident was God's power in Paul's life. Paul had the gift of healing and was not hesitant to use his gift for the benefit of others (1 Cor. 12:28, 30). Indeed all should pray for recovery of the sick (Jas. 5:14). What should be kept in mind at all times is the simple biblical fact that it is not always God's will for people be healed (2 Tim. 4:20).

One's gifts must always be used for benefit of others. No case is too hard. No one is turned away. God's power, God's gift, is never for selfish purposes. We are vessels of clay molded for other people's benefit, especially as we carry the message of the Gospel.

III. Paul was a Purposeful Man (vv. 11-22)

We have seen thus far in our study God's protection over Paul and God's power at work in Paul. Every believer must understand God's desire to use him or her in the very same way. It is not that God will make us apostles in the same sense as the Apostle Paul. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit empowers people today in the very same way He empowered people in the first century.

Paul's purpose is revealed in *particular* ways. First, his purpose was *anticipated*. His desire to go to Rome in spite of all costs is clear (19:21; Rom. 1:10-16). His life had a destination quality about it. Does yours? Do you know where you are going? Some Christians are like brooms; they sweep in many directions, with no real design or plan. They simply go in one direction and then another. On the other hand, some Christians are like swords. They have one point; they are focused; and they slice their way through every difficult obstacle of life. They know deeply within their hearts God has a plan for them. What you need to realize today is, God has plan for your life.

Second, his purpose was *accomplished*. God brought about His purpose. What He did not do was to bring about His purpose in Paul's life the way Paul expected. Undoubtedly Paul prayed for a prosperous journey. He ended up shipwrecked! Paul prayed for safety and God sent a storm which wrecked the ship. Christians tend to think God only works when things are smooth. Not so. Indeed the shipwreck was the occasion through which God worked his providential protection over Paul. And, as we see Paul preached the Gospel in Rome.

Reflection Connection

Do you believe God still heals today? Explain. What do you tell a person whom God has not healed even though prayers are sincerely offered for delivery?

Reflection Connection

Dr. Vines mentioned the images of brooms and swords Christians bear. Which image do you think fits you? Explain.



IV. Paul was a Preaching Man (vv. 23-31)

Paul's gift for preaching cannot be overestimated. Since his Damascus Road experience, he had been everywhere preaching and teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Preaching was his passion; preaching was his life. And for good reason. Preaching is the means through which God chooses to save people. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:17-18). No one believed in preaching's necessity more than the Apostle Paul.

Furthermore, without hesitation, Paul preached to every class, group, and race he met. He firmly believed God "was no respecter of persons." Thus we find Paul preaching to Jews. In fact, Paul's practice when he came to town was to head to the closest Jewish synagogue and proclaim Christ.

Yet Paul did not always wait for a crowd to assemble before he preached. He took the time to preach Christ even to an individual. The individual could be a fellow prisoner or the prison guard (cp. 16:30-31). For him, it did not matter. The significance lay in the value of the person's soul and the glory of Jesus Christ.

Does your heart stir to share Christ?

Do you possess a confidence in the Gospel that, if you will share it, people will accept it and be saved?

Reflection Connection

Do you think there is too much focus on sharing Christ to masses rather than individuals? Why or why not?

Does your heart stir to share Christ? Do you possess a confidence in the Gospel that, if you will share it, people will accept it and be saved? Charles Spurgeon, the famous British preacher, was lecturing on the Gospel and invitations after which a student approached him saying, "Mr. Spurgeon, when I preach, no one comes forward." Very seriously, Spurgeon asked the young man, "You do not believe someone should be saved every time you preach, do you?" "No, not at all" the young preacher replied. "That's the problem, then," said Spurgeon. "A man who preaches the Gospel must believe in the power of the Gospel to save!"

Paul believed in the Gospel's power: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

The object of all preaching is singular—a decision: "And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not" (v. 24). As we noted above, we must believe in the Gospel's power to save. But we also must accept the tragic fact that some men choose to reject. Heaven and hell are always in the balance when we preach.

Additionally, a warning is clearly offered to all people. Paul quotes Isaiah the Prophet, "Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall



not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them” (vv. 26-27). A time may come when one’s heart is no longer moved. Don’t allow such a possibility to come to you or those whom you know. Trust Him today.

Golden Greek Nugget

Luke records the frightening image of Paul’s attack by a “beast” (vv. 3-5). The Greek word basically means “wild animal.” However, in classical Greek, the term was occasionally used for reptiles. Obviously, the intent Luke has is to describe a poisonous snake crawling from the kindling wood and biting the Apostle Paul.

Wrap Up

Let’s close with the question in the beginning of the lesson: are you a person God can use? The answer Acts 28 gives us is a resounding yes! You are and I am. The question we must now answer is, are you willing (am I willing) to surrender yourself to God and allow Him to use you as a vessel of His choosing? His protection is engaged; His purpose is fixed: His power is available. Will we faithfully preach His Gospel to the ends of the globe? We must! Maranatha. Come Lord.

