

Acts-by Tommy Lee

Chapter 1

Compare Acts 1.1 with Luke 1.1-4, and you'll see that the book of Acts is really the Gospel of Luke, Part II. In his Gospel, Luke *"dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach"* (Acts 1.1); here, in his history of the first thirty years of the Christian church, he is dealing with all that Jesus continued to do and teach—through the work and life of his body, his people, his church (filled with the Holy Spirit of Jesus, see 1.4,5; 2.4). And one thing that we'll see, several weeks from now, is that the book of Acts doesn't really end. It never actually concludes or resolves; it's left open-ended. And that means that Jesus is still doing and teaching through his church, even today!... Note in v.3 that the resurrected Jesus met with his disciples for 40 days before his ascension, speaking to them about *"the kingdom of God."* But note, in v.6 (and compare with Luke 24.21), that they are still pretty self-absorbed. How often are we like that?... What you have in v.8 is a roadmap for the rest of Acts: the church will bear loving witness to the resurrected Jesus *"in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

Chapter 2

It's the day of Pentecost (v.1), which is a Jewish feast day, celebrating the wheat harvest. Pentecost comes 50 days (*"pentecost" = "fiftieth day"*) after Passover. So. It's been around 50 days since Jesus was crucified. But this particular day of Pentecost, in Acts 2, is going to mark a *very different kind of harvest...* it is the beginning of a history-long harvest of eternal souls, brought into the church of God, forgiven of sin, through the proclamation of the gospel of the risen Christ. Because it's a feast day, Jerusalem is crowded with *"men from every nation under heaven"* (v.5), and that's when a sound like a mighty rushing wind and divided tongues as of fire come upon the apostles (vs.2,3). The Spirit is being poured out upon the church, as Jesus promised (v.4; see 1.5), and nothing will ever be the same...The scattering and confusing curse of the Tower of Babel is reversed and undone, as everyone hears the good news of Jesus Christ in their own language (vs.6-11). And, starting on that day, this re-centering and reconciling Word would now go out to all nations. This is not man coming to God; it is very much God coming to man.

Chapter 3

Acts 3.1 to 4.31 is actually one continuous story, cause and effect, over and over. And by the end of the story, the same leaders of Jerusalem who opposed Jesus are now positioned to oppose his church. The church will need to pray for courage (which is exactly what they do, at the conclusion of this whole episode, in 4.23-31). But let's start at the beginning... Note that what could have been a perfunctory, empty, busy, mechanical gesture of Christian charity, which took little notice of the person, actually became a *real* interaction and a *personal* encounter. *"Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, 'Look at us'"* (v.4). *"What I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.... And he took him by the right hand..."* (vs.6,7) And we then read in v.11 that the healed man *"clung to Peter and John."* And, when given the opportunity to explain what just happened, notice how Peter deliberately turns all attention *away* from himself. He denies any special power and piety (v.12); rather, he focuses everyone's attention on repentance of sin and faith in Jesus. Do we love and speak like this?

Chapter 4

The work of the Spirit in these early days of the church (among a certain people—the Jews—who had long been prepared for the Messiah, through their history and their Scriptures) was amazing. We've already seen the church grow from 120 (see 1.15) to 3,000 (see 2.41), and now, to 5,000 (see 4.4). And these early converts to Christ did not merely add Christianity onto their already-busy lives; rather, they *"they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread*

and the prayers" (2.42). But, of course, the early response to the gospel was not uniformly positive... but note that all the conflict in this passage began with *"a good deed done to a crippled man,"* in the name of Christ (v.9). May all the church's trouble start in ways like that! Notice that Peter again takes this opportunity to bear witness to Jesus—*"there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"* (v.12). And consider carefully the "boldness" (v.13) of the church in the rest of the chapter. They don't even pray for victory, but for yet more boldness (v.29).

Chapter 5

Back in 2.42-47 Luke described for us what the church community was like in the days after Pentecost. One of the most amazing parts of that description was the generosity of the believers—how freely they gave to one another, as need was found within the church family. This beautiful fruit of the gospel was just revisited and elaborated upon in 4.32-37. But now, in chapter 5, we discover that not all was perfect in the early church community. (*There has never yet been an ideal church!*) Please note from Peter's questions that the great sin of Ananias and Sapphira was *not* in keeping some of their money for themselves; it was in the lie, a deception they had carefully planned out together ahead of time. And God's judgment upon this is rather startling, but let it remind us of how much our God despises hypocrisy in his church. May verse 11 still ring true for us today: *"And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things."* And note how this fear of God then leads to continued blessings and growth within the church, in verses 12-16.

Chapter 6

Luke has mentioned before (2.44-47; 4.32-35) how beautifully the Christians met one another's physical needs with self-sacrificial sharing and giving. But here in the early part of chapter six we see something of the scope and regularity of that ministry of mercy. In these early days of the Christian church, there were two distinct cultural groups: Jews who spoke Aramaic/Hebrew as their main language, and Jews who spoke Greek as their main language (*"the Hellenists,"* v.1). A dispute has risen between the two groups regarding perceived favoritism in the mercy ministry. And—putting the whole of the New Testament together—this dispute gives rise to the great and noble office of the *deacon*. The church is told to *"pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty"* (v.3). Here you see something of the division of labor between the elder office and the deacon office (see vs.2&4). But that division is never airtight. To see that, just keep an eye on the stories of Deacon Stephen and Deacon Philip.

Chapter 7

In yesterday's chapter we saw that Stephen (one of the first seven deacons of the church) was falsely accused of speaking *"blasphemous words against Moses and God"* (6.11). But, in great irony, at the end of that chapter Stephen's face was seen to be shining like the face of an angel (6.15). Do you remember whose face shone like that in the Old Testament? Moses, after he had been communing with God (see Exodus 34.29-35); this should have been a clue that the enemies were missing something. Or Someone. Stephen's speech in Acts 7 is the longest speech (of the many) found in the book of Acts. And its purpose is this: to demonstrate that God had a living and long-standing relationship with his people that actually predated both the law of Moses & the Temple. Stephen was not attacking the Temple & the law of Moses (as was the charge, see 6.13,14). Stephen was showing how Jesus is the fulfillment of all that the law & the Temple pointed towards. These were expressions of this relationship, not the core. Jesus is the core.

Chapter 8

In a seemingly throw-away line, at the end of 7.58, we were introduced to *"a young man named Saul."* And then, in the first 3 verses of chapter 8, we are further introduced to this violent activist, full of furious zeal, ravaging the Lord's church, madly entering the houses of believers, dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. But remember what Stephen prayed for Saul (and his other persecutors) in the final verse of chapter 7? *"Lord, do not hold this sin against them."* What if the Lord granted this prayer for Saul? What if God forgave Saul of his great sin, and turned his unholy, militant, *hatred* for Jesus into a holy, radical *love* for Jesus? What would that look like? Let's keep an eye on this man... And if you already know where the Saul story is headed, you might now read these verses with more poignancy: 1 Corinthians 15.9; Galatians 1.13,23; Philippians 3.6; 1 Timothy 1.13. Also note that it is persecution (a word first used in Acts right here, in 8.1) that drives the church out into mission, here in this chapter, and in the chapters that follow. See 8.4.

Chapter 9

He was completely unmentioned in the book of Acts until the seemingly throw-away line of 7.58. And then we heard just a little bit more about him (a verse & a half, to be exact) in chapter 8. But now Saul (who will soon change his name to Paul, see 13.9) is about to become the most significant human actor *in* this book. He will be the almost exclusive focus from the middle of chapter 12 until the very end, in chapter 28. This chapter tells the story of his conversion to Christianity. But that event is so very important to the story of the early church that this same event is still going to be told two more times in this book (in chapters 22 and 26), with a little bit more detail added each time. This is, many would say, the second most influential day in all of history, second only to the day of Christ's resurrection. It would be very difficult to exaggerate the impact of the Apostle Paul's work. Look at his simple confession of faith in v.20: *"He is the Son of God."* For Saul, conversion didn't mean deserting his former system of belief; it meant accepting Jesus as the fulfillment of it.

Chapter 10

The two brief stories at the end of chapter 9 (vs.32-35 & then 36-43) momentarily brought Peter back to the center of the action; but more importantly, they set the stage for what we read today: the momentous and pivotal matter of "the Gentile question." This is also (like Saul's conversion story that we read yesterday) an event of far-reaching ramifications for the church. (And we know that because, like what we read yesterday, it's going to be told in great detail, and then told all over again—see chapters 11 and then another reference in chapter 15.) It's another turning point in the story of our faith, our church. The conversion of Cornelius the Gentile sparks a controversy and crisis in the early church: *"Can we directly and immediately accept Gentiles who merely repent of their sins and believe in Jesus? Or do we need to insist that they become Jews first?"* Do you understand how important that question is for the gospel? For the church? For the nations (the word "Gentiles" simply means "the nations")? For you? The Lord is shaping the body of Christ...

Chapter 11

First, the final scene of yesterday's story. Peter has to defend his actions; he dared to visit and eat with Gentiles (v.3). It's a scandal. Peter tells his critics all that happened, ending with these words, in v.17: *"If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"* And that was enough. The critics were convinced. *"When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life'"* (v.18). The church is beginning to comprehend the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ. May we continue to *"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* today (2 Peter 3.18)! Note a slow-but-steady shift in the church's direction and focus in vs.19 and

20. Barnabas (the "son of encouragement" to whom we were introduced in 4.36, then again in 9.26,27) goes to investigate this development. When he came, "*he saw the grace of God*" (v.23). Then he fetches Saul (vs.25,26).

Chapter 12

The persecution is getting more deadly. Herod has James killed with the sword (v.2). And when that proved to be a big hit with his constituents, he "*proceeded to arrest Peter also*" (v.3). This does not look good for Peter. But remember... in some inexplicable way, the authorities have had trouble containing Peter in the past (see 5.22-25). So this time they take precautions: according to vs.4-10, four squads of soldiers (!) are assigned to guard Peter; he even sleeps between two soldiers; he's bound with two chains, with sentries guarding the prison door, and even more guards posted after that, before you get to an iron gate. "*But earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church*" (v.5). So... Peter is abruptly woken out of his sleep one night by an angel of the Lord striking him on the side and telling him to "*get up quickly*" (v.7). He had to strike Peter because an angel standing next to him shining brightly wasn't enough to wake him (v.7). Do you remember that night in the gospels when Peter kept falling asleep on Jesus? Must have been a hard sleeper.

Chapter 13

At the end of yesterday's chapter, Herod was said to have "*the voice of a god*" (12.22). But, in contrast to Herod's unpleasant fate, the true Word of God was increasing and multiplying (12.24). And much of that was the result of God's setting apart Barnabas and Saul as missionaries (vs.2,3). It's at this point in the story that it's especially fun to start consulting the maps that are usually found at the back of our Bibles. Note that Paul's evangelistic work would always begin with the Jews, but then move into the Gentile population of each community. Speaking of evangelism, let me encourage you in one of the great joys of an open-hearted eagerness to share your faith; namely, the enormous variety of people to whom God will introduce you. Here we meet a Jewish magician/false prophet (v.6) and a highly intelligent government official who was curious about the gospel (v.7) and then becomes a believer (v.12). The sermons of Acts, by the way, are always worthy of careful study. Outlining the flow of thought is a great way to learn the Bible and theology.

Chapter 14

At the end of the last chapter, we saw five things: the Gentiles are coming into the kingdom (13.48), the Word of the Lord is spreading (13.49), the enemies of the gospel are stirring up persecution (13.50), the apostles are undaunted (13.51), and the disciples are filled with joy and the Holy Spirit (13.52). This pattern of gospel ministry shall continue in our present chapter—and even unto today!.... There is an ancient story about Zeus and Hermes visiting a town in the area of Lystra, not being recognized, receiving a cool reception, and then destroying the town for being so inhospitable. Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas show up with miraculous powers of healing, the people of Lystra make a reasonable (to them) assumption, and fire up the welcome committee, not wanting to be destroyed. There seems to have been a language barrier problem (see v.11) involved here too, which made everyone slow to understand what the others were saying.... Note in v.23 the importance of faithful elders to the health of the church. See 1 Timothy 3.1-13 and Titus 1.5-9.

Chapter 15

One important thing about the Bible, that sets it far apart from the sacred writings of other religions, is the Bible's readiness to depict not only the successes and faithfulness of the people of God, but also their struggles, their conflicts, and their failures. We have one such example before us today. (*Two such examples actually; see the second one in vs.36-41. But back to the first...*) The great success of the

Mission to the Gentiles has now led to *"no small dissension and debate"* (v.2). Some within the church are teaching, *"Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved"* (v.1). This might sound absurd to us, but within first-century Jewish Christianity, where there is no completed "New Testament" yet, where the Jewish Messiah has finally come as prophesied in the Jewish Scriptures, to answer Jewish questions and bring about the fulfillment of the Jewish law, as the Great Jewish Prophet, Priest, and King... it was a legitimate question. But read carefully how the gospel answers this question, and learn gospel wisdom.

Chapter 16

There are three important principles to faithful, true evangelism that I find to be very helpful. **1: Be who you are.** Be the person God made you to be. Don't try to be Billy Graham or Tim Keller or Mother Teresa or Nancy Guthrie. That's not genuine to who God made you to be. Be *you*. God wasn't confused when he made you *you*. **2: Tell what you know.** Often we keep our silence when we could bear witness, out of fear that we don't know enough. Do you know that we were created in communion with God? Do you know that we've now fallen into the ruin of sin and death? Do you know that God sent his son Jesus to redeem us? Do you know that he is our only hope of salvation? That's plenty to get a good conversation started. You probably know a lot more than you think. And if you're asked a question you don't know, that's okay. It's an opportunity to humble yourself, study, and grow. **3: Love the person in front of you.** Don't wait around for some other, theoretical, imaginary people. Love that person right there. Now look at v.14. Go. And be bold.

Chapter 17

How about one quick point from each section of today's chapter? **In vs.1-9** we are in Thessalonica; notice in v.2 that Paul *"reasoned with"* the Jews. He didn't quarrel with them and he didn't just go along with them. He sought to persuade them of two specific truths: that the Jewish Scriptures said that the Messiah/Christ would suffer and rise from the dead (v.3a), and that Jesus of Nazareth was, in fact, that Messiah/Christ (v.3b). **In vs.10-15** we are in Berea; notice in v.11 that the Bereans were *"more noble than those in Thessalonica."* They weren't more noble because they agreed with Paul; rather, their nobility is seen in this: when they did not necessarily agree, they didn't act out in jealousy or defensiveness. Rather, they were *"examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so."* **In vs.16-34** we are in Athens; notice how differently Paul speaks here. Why is this? Earlier he was among Jews who knew the Scriptures. Now he is among pagan Gentiles, who know poetry and philosophy. But in both situations, he points to Christ (see v.31).

Chapter 18

Have you ever met some people who then became *lifelong* friends? That's Paul's experience in v.2, when he meets Aquila and Priscilla (see the rest of this chapter; Romans 16.3; 1 Corinthians 16.19; 2 Timothy 4.19)... But despite the blessing of new friends, Paul's stay in Corinth was a great test for him, in many ways. (Read the early chapters of 1 Corinthians to hear Paul reflect on this more.) But the Lord encouraged his servant mightily: *"And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people'"* (v.9). Reflect on that encouragement for a while. Paul isn't responsible to convert people. He can't reach into someone's chest and give them a new heart; he's just called to bear faithful witness. The Lord converts, the Lord saves, the Lord calls "his people" to himself. Samuel Rutherford, a Scottish Presbyterian pastor who died in 1661 use to say: *"Duties belong to us; events belong to God."* Amen.

Chapter 19

Paul stayed in Ephesus for almost three years, and this account of his time there is *full* of intriguing details. We focus in on the mighty confrontation that the gospel brought: the showdown between the power of the Living God and the power of magic and the occult, with which Ephesus was fascinated. It is in this context that Luke records, "*God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul*" (v.11)—as if there are any "ordinary" miracles! And then, in the next story (vs.13-16), some non-Christian Jews try to leverage this extraordinary power of God by just using the name "Jesus." But, as they soon discover, God's power isn't attached to the name Jesus in a magical abracadabra sort of way. Comically, they want to clarify to the evil spirit which Jesus they are referring to: "*Jesus whom Paul proclaims.*" The Spirit informs them that he already knows of Jesus and of Paul. But he doesn't know them; nor do they have any power over him... as *he* then clarifies. It's not knowing his name in a mechanical way that counts; it's knowing *him*. See vs.17-20.

Chapter 20

The account of vs.7-12 is one of my favorite stories in the Bible, for many reasons. One thing it does is give us one of the New Testament's occasional glimpses into the life of the early church. I'd love to know much more about the early church, but here we see that they met on the first day of the week and broke bread together (v.7)—which we still do today! Because he was leaving them the next day, Paul's sermon went on for quite a while. "*He prolonged his speech until midnight*" (v.7); he then "*talked still longer*" (v.9). And then—after the drama with Eutychus—he still "*conversed with them a long while, until daybreak*" (v.11). I imagine, after the miraculous raising of poor Eutychus from the dead, everyone else now had an easier time staying awake! But this account also shows us that the youth (see v.9, Eutychus was "*a young man*") were very much a part of the life of the church. Let's pray for our own youth, and welcome and expect their participation in the bride of Christ. "*Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth...*" (Ecclesiastes 12.1).

Chapter 21

Do you remember the emotional scene that ended the last chapter? "*And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him*" (20.36,37). And now we see a similar thing here, in vs.5 & 6: "*And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed and said farewell to one another.*" When was the last time you knelt in prayer with other believers? Have you ever done so? It is such a powerful thing to kneel with others to pray. Almost every person I've ever known who has left Protestantism for Roman Catholicism mentions this as a chief reason for their decision. And yet, it's not a Roman Catholic thing; it's a Biblical thing! We have deprived and defrauded ourselves by giving it up. From C.S. Lewis' book, *The Screwtape Letters*: "*At the very least, they can be persuaded that the bodily position makes no difference to their prayers; for they constantly forget, what you must always remember, that they are animals and that whatever their bodies do affects their souls.*"

Chapter 22

This speech (from 21.37-22.22) is the first of what are sometimes called "the defense speeches." You can learn a great deal about the Apostle Paul by reading them all carefully, and comparing them with similar sections of his letters, such as Philippians 3.4-6. Note that he speaks to them in "*the Hebrew language*" (21.40; 22.2), which is a good start when the crowd wants you executed under accusations of being anti-Jewish. Paul then goes through his Jewish credentials, which plainly put him in the "top 1 percent" club for impressive Jewishness. Gamaliel, mentioned as Paul's teacher in v.3, was a leading Jewish rabbi of the time (see 5.34). Paul next moves to his past staunch record of Christian persecution, which should assure them of his zeal for Judaism. However, he then explains, he himself suddenly became a Christian because—as a good Jew—what else can one do when one is confronted with visions

and a message from the Lord? A good Jew must obey the Word of the Lord! Anyone who fears the Lord could not have done otherwise.

Chapter 23

In v.6 Paul realizes that his accusers are part Sadducees and part Pharisees. One of the big differences between these two Jewish "parties" is that the Sadducees denied the doctrine of resurrection (see Matthew 22.23. See also the children's song that helpfully explains that this is the reason the Sadducees were so "sad, you see"). There were other differences as well, but just understand that they were even more vehemently opposed to one another than the most partisan of Republicans and Democrats in our day. Back to v.6, Paul then shrewdly threw a theological hand grenade into their midst: *"Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial."* Verses 7-10 show the result. This was indeed shrewd (see Matthew 10.16), as it immediately discredited Paul's accusers in the eyes of the Roman commander. But it was also sincere, forthright, honest, and straightforward. The resurrected Jesus appeared to Paul. That is his self-defense. See 1 Corinthians 15.12-15.

Chapter 24

This is the first of three hearings that Paul will have before important government officials. As the hearings continue, it becomes more and more obvious to everyone—both the reader outside the story and all the people who are inside the story—that Paul should not be in prison. He is only kept there out of prejudice, political posturing, and technicalities. And v.26 plainly tells us that only a bribe stood between Paul and freedom! But Paul is innocent (see vs.10-21), and will not resort to bribery.... Verses 24 and 25 are interesting: *"After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, 'Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.'"* Note the contrast between the practical and urgent spiritual matters on which Paul speaks, and the self-absorbed and convenience-preoccupied response of Felix. *"Hell is truth known too late."* ~J.C. Ryle

Chapter 25

In v.13 King Herod Agrippa and his wife Bernice pay a state visit to the newly-appointed Festus. King Agrippa knows Judaism pretty well, so Festus is interested in his opinion of this whole *"the Jews vs. Paul"* matter that he had just inherited from Felix (see 24.27). And—like a 5th grade boy who hasn't done any research, but the paper is due tomorrow—Festus doesn't know what to write in his report about the prisoner. Verses 25-27: *"But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him."* Festus's bewilderment over the central charge is almost funny: they are arguing over *"a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive"* (v.19). Yes. Amen.

Chapter 26

The whole of Paul's speech (and this is just a summary of his speech, not the whole of it) is worthy of careful study and reflection. But in v.20, Paul says that he was simply being obedient to the heavenly vision, declaring to all *"that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance."* This, he says in v.21, is why the Jewish authorities want him dead. Paul then went on to speak about the relationship of Christ and his gospel to the prophets and to Moses (vs.22,23). The

interaction that Paul then has with both Festus and King Agrippa in vs.24-29 must have been very impressive to all who witnessed it. How many prisoners would engage these men with such courage and wit? Most prisoners, surely, would rather be begging for their lives. But Paul doesn't beg for his life. He doesn't beg for his freedom. Rather, he wishes all of his hearers could become like him! Except for the chains (v.29). Let's ask God to give us such zeal for the gospel. What is our life? What is our freedom? *"Christ is all, and in all"* (Colossians 3.11).

Chapter 27

The Apostle Paul, sadly, had some experience with shipwrecks and the sea: *"Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea"* (2 Corinthians 11.25). So Julius the centurion (v.1) would have been well advised to listen to Paul... but he did not: *"the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said"* (v.11). Then, once they find themselves in the midst of *"a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster"* (v.14), they begin taking all the correct ancient-world life-saving procedures in the midst of a raging sea (vs.15-19). But as the situation became more and more desperate, Luke reports, *"all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned"* (v.20). One can't help but smile at the "I told you so" tone at the beginning of Paul's speech in vs.21-26. But really he seems to be revisiting his previous advice in order to give the crew more cause to accept his current advice, which is to *"take heart"* (see both vs.22 & 25), and believe the Word of Paul's God. By the end Julius is not only listening to Paul, but saving him (v.43).

Chapter 28

The ending of the book of Acts has always struck me as very curious. After all this long, drawn-out detail of Paul's arrest and imprisonments, his defense speeches, the appeal to Caesar, the long voyage, and his eventual arrival in Rome... we don't get to hear what happened with his case, his trial, his appeal. Why is that? Doesn't it make the whole book of Acts feel strangely unresolved, open-ended, and unfinished to you? Well. The book of Acts *is* unresolved, open-ended, and unfinished! It's the story of the church, and that story is still being written. Right now, at this very moment, if you are a member of the church, *you are still in the book of Acts*. Will you continue to live within this call to inhabit this world as Jesus' *"witnesses"* (1.8), as we were commanded to do at the beginning?... Remember, Luke wrote two books. The Gospel of Luke and then the Acts of the Apostles. He has traced the Christian story from its beginnings, in the mysterious capital city of Jerusalem right up to very center of the ancient world, Rome. That story continues today, in Decatur.

-Reflecting on Acts-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Acts. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Acts before we move forward?

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock." Matthew 7.24