

ACTS

ACTS PART 16 - ACTS 27-28:10



ACTS

God's Mission | God's People | God's Power

SUFFERING THAT SERVES THE GOSPEL

Paul is learning to use his suffering to serve the Gospel

"This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment." Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

– Acts 26:31

"These declarations of innocence make it clear that Paul and Christianity could not be charged with sedition against the state. Nothing in the conduct of the messengers called the truthfulness, value, and benefit of the message into question."

– William Larkin

The early church was very careful that they did not ruin their witness to the world around them or bring the credibility of the Gospel into question...even if it cost them their comfort or ease.

"As [Paul] endures suffering, he learns to use it to serve the gospel. Seen in this way, Acts gives the reader a theol-

-ology of suffering that is particularly exemplified in the life and work of the apostle"

– David Peterson

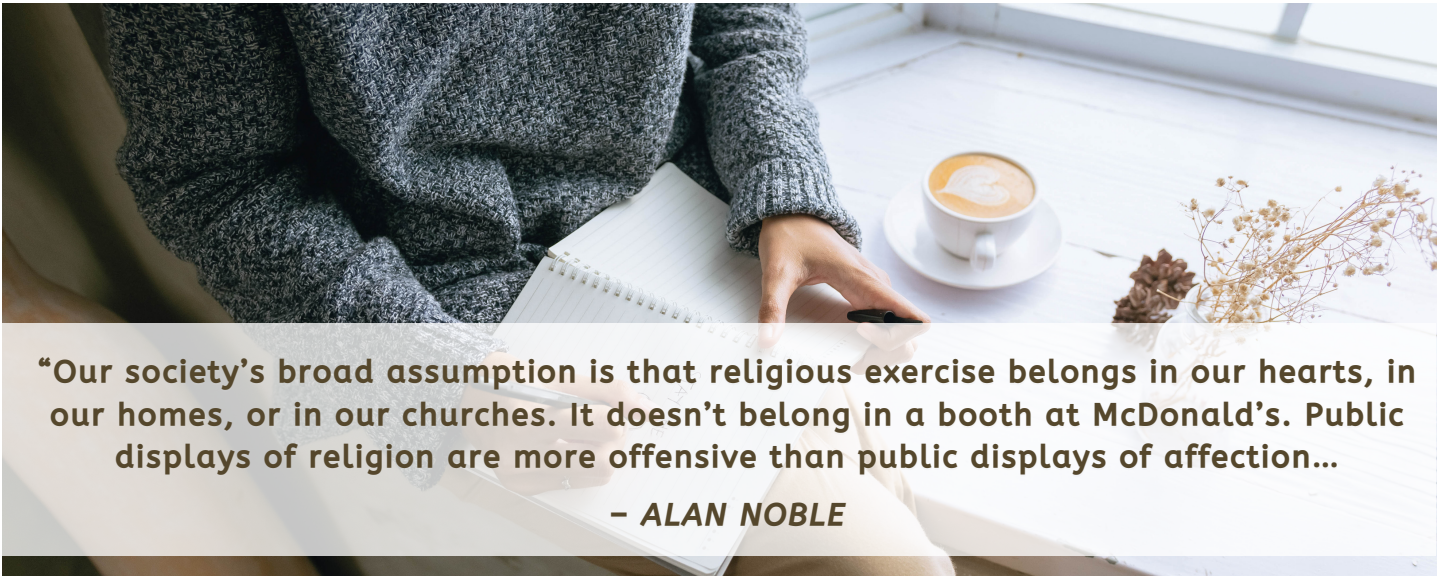
1. Paul Shows us how to Integrate Reason and Faith - not one vs. the other

"Paul...combines spirituality with sanity, and faith with works. He believed that God would keep his promises and had the courage to say grace in the presence of a crowd of hard-bitten pagans....He was a man of God and a man of action, a man of the Spirit and of common sense"

– John Stott

In whatever our work, we can pray, and think about, bringing both our faith and our experience and our education to bear on the things God has called us to do.

2. Paul's Response is from a place of Public Truth for the Public Good



“Our society’s broad assumption is that religious exercise belongs in our hearts, in our homes, or in our churches. It doesn’t belong in a booth at McDonald’s. Public displays of religion are more offensive than public displays of affection...

– ALAN NOBLE

Paul *prays* – he gives thanks to God – as he encourages the passengers and crew to “eat.” One of the challenges we face in our cultural moment is the underlying assumption that “faith should be a private thing.”

“Our society’s broad assumption is that religious exercise belongs in our hearts, in our homes, or in our churches. It doesn’t belong in a booth at McDonald’s. Public displays of religion are more offensive than public displays of affection...”

– Alan Noble

Paul is not weird about his faith – but he’s not *private* about it either. He breaks bread, and he gives thanks to God among people who don’t share his faith.

When God’s people act in line with the hospitable character of God, for the public good, we reflect God’s own graciousness.

3. Paul doesn’t deepen the suffering for himself or others

We suffer because we live in a fallen world – and things are not as they should be – or one day will be. We suffer because we make choices that can either cause or deepen our own suffering. We suffer because others have made choices that hurt us. And we suffer because those who follow Jesus are being opposed by an enemy – God’s enemy – and this will make life more difficult at times.

My prayer is that you would not add unnecessarily to your suffering, or of those around you, which can happen a number of ways. Too often our response to suffering actually pushes people who love us farther away.

Or we turn to patterns of numbing the pain rather than addressing it, and that can lead to addictive, destructive ways of life. Or we seek control our situation, and people around us get hurt as a result.

- We don’t even know the depths of God’s graciousness to us in sparing us pain upon pain.
- We can actually find reasons to worship while in the storm. To say “thank you God” (see Paul and Silas in jail in Acts 16)

God is still more loving and kind than we can dream, even in our hurts. May God give you and I the grace to see his goodness – and turn it back in to praise today.

4. Paul Sees His Suffering as Serving the Gospel

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it”

– Luke 9:23-24

Paul has internalized this idea and is now living it out. That’s why Paul will tell the Philippians church, in Philippians 1:29, “For it has been granted to you not only to believe [in Jesus], but to suffering for him.”

“Whoever enters discipleship enters Jesus’ death, and puts his or her own life into death;”

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*

Like Paul, we extend hospitality – in a sense “setting the table” for the other to experience good things. It’s in praying for and seeking the good of those who treat us in ‘enemy’ ways.

Reflection and Life Group Discussion:



1. How do you, or people in your circles, tend to think about suffering? Why is that?
2. Scholar David Peterson, speaking about Acts 21-28, says: "As [Paul] endures suffering, he learns to use it to serve the gospel. Seen in this way, Acts gives the reader a theology of suffering that is particularly exemplified in the life and work of the apostle"

- David Peterson, Witness to the Gospel:
The Theology of Acts

Read Acts 27:9-44.

- How does Paul respond with both practicality and spirituality in this situation?

Reflect on the following quote:

Paul...combines spirituality with sanity, and faith with works. He believed that God would keep his promises and had the courage to say grace in the presence of a crowd of hard-bitten pagans....He was a man of God and a man of action, a man of the Spirit and of common sense

- John Stott

- How does this remind us that Christian thinking integrates spirituality and reason? Do you tend to emphasize one over the other? What makes it difficult to hold these two together?
3. In his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer argues that at least one element of "taking up your cross daily," means that we take up the ministry of forgiving others. For what is Jesus doing on the cross? He's bearing the sins of others in his own body. Why? To make his 'enemies' into friends.

To forgive them, so that he might embrace them forever.

- a. How does offering real forgiveness require a sort of 'death' to our own pride or longing for revenge? Have you experienced this?
 - b. How might the 'suffering' of painful relationships, and the forgiveness work that we have to go through become part of our witness to the Gospel?
4. In the message, Pastor Dave said: "When we let this good news, that we have already been embraced by God through the suffering of Jesus, when that grabs hold of us – *we can treat one who acts as an 'enemy' to us as a friend. Because we know that nothing done to us goes unnoticed by God.*

We can live the words Paul writes to the church in Rome: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

- How does this encourage or challenge you?
- Is there a situation where you need to embrace this approach or adopt it again? Where appropriate, share with your group for prayer.

Pastor Dave

