

“The Person Who Makes A Difference”

Acts 27 - 28

Series: Book of Acts [#27]

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Introduction

Do you want to make a difference? To help and change things for the better? Many people see themselves as one small grain of sand in the mountainous mass of 6.8 billion people on this planet. “How can I make a difference?” “How can I help, change things for the better?”

And yet we are frequently told, “You *can* make a difference!” We hear it in appeals for...

- social and political causes;
- the environment and education;
- for employees and volunteers;
- and, of course, for spiritual life and the church.

Our world is spiritually dark, parched and barren. God wants to use each of us to bring His light, life and fruitfulness. “You *can* make a difference!”

We see the reality of making a difference as we complete this trek through the book of Acts today. Paul made a difference in his world. Luke has outlined his three missionary journeys during which many people came to know Christ and churches were started and nurtured.

Chapter 27 picks it up in the fall of the year 59. Jews in Jerusalem had brought charges against Paul. He had been moved from the military commander to the governor, and then on to the next governor, and from there to the king of the region over a period of two years. Paul exercised his rights as a Roman citizen to appeal his case to Caesar and now, finally, was being sent to Rome.

There are three qualities we see here in Paul that are found in every believer who makes a difference. Paul’s abilities, gifts, mission and accomplishments were unique. But these three qualities, and being used by God to make a difference, were not unique. God intends that each one of His children make a difference for time and eternity.

Assumes The Position Of Being Owned By Christ.

The person who makes a difference, first of all assumes the position of being owned by Christ. It is important to have a clear understanding that being owned by Christ is part of the nature of every believer. When you placed your faith in Jesus Christ, and God forgave and cleansed you of all your sin, when He accounted Christ’s righteous to you, when He justified you fully and forever in Christ, you became His possession forever.

Paul stated this reality for himself here in 27:23 when he referred to God as the one “to whom I *belong*.” In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul sounded the call for careful, God-glorifying living and underscored the importance of it by writing,

“... do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that *you are not your own*? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.” (19-20)

Christ redeemed or purchased us out of sin for Himself with His own blood, His own life. We focused on this earlier this morning in Communion.

In Titus 2:14 Paul wrote that Christ

“... gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people *for His own possession*, zealous for good deeds.”

There are a number of New Testament words translated *redeem*. One of them, if you broke it down literally, would mean “to buy out of the market place.” Paul used it in Galatians 3, “Christ *redeemed* us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us...” (13a).

So, if you know Christ as your Savior, part of your new life, your new nature, is that you belong to Him. He owns you. Now, in our natural thinking, we might not see this from an entirely positive perspective. After all, we are *people*, not objects nor animals which can *belong* to someone.

But, the reality is that we never were free, even though that is what we thought. Ephesians 2 tells us that before Christ in addition to being spiritually dead in our sins, we

“walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience” (2); and that we “were by nature children of wrath” (3).

But now, because we belong to God, His life and blessings, His direction and protection are ours to enjoy...*forever!* As a believer, Christ owns you.

Now, every believer who makes a difference assumes the position of being owned by Christ. Paul assumed this position daily. It was so much a part of identity and thinking that it was how he described or identified himself to others. In 27:23 he said he belonged to God. He introduced himself in his letters as “a bond-servant of Christ Jesus” (Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10). The record of Acts clearly shows Paul assuming the position in each day and circumstance.

With respect to the events in these two chapters, remember that King Agrippa’s decision after hearing Paul was “This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar (26:32). Why did Paul appeal to Caesar before Agrippa and Festus ruled on his case? Remember, the night following Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem “the Lord stood at his side and

said, “Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, *so you must witness at Rome also*” (23:11). You see, Paul did not make a tactical error in appealing to Caesar early. He belonged to Christ. When Christ told him he must witness at Rome, he acted on his master’s, his owner’s direction and started the process of getting to Rome.

And, since he took his marching orders from his owner, he advised the soldiers and officers on the ship to Rome that God had shown him that if they proceeded they would experience “damage and great loss” (27:10). Even though he was a Roman citizen, he was a prisoner. Prisoners had no standing with the officers.

And, when what he said started to unfold, he reminded them, he told them they should have listened to him (27:21). He did not say this to make himself look good, but to demonstrate that God knows what is ahead, and speaks truthfully. Then he went on to tell them what God’s angel had told him, that they would lose the ship but be safe. They didn’t listen to him before, so why risk being laughed at now? He spoke because God had spoken and no matter what the sailors or soldiers might think, he had to say what his owner said.

Jump ahead to Rome. The Jews in Jerusalem brought charges against him. So, it might have seemed wise to *fly below the radar* until after his trial, to not say anything that could cause the Jews here in Rome to join the fray. But Paul witnessed for Christ openly, boldly to Jews and Gentiles in Rome for two years. *Why?* Because God told him “you must witness at Rome also” (23:11).

Make no mistake here. If you and I are to be used by God to make a difference, we must assume the position of being owned by Him. To do this decisively, once for all, as Paul wrote in Romans 12. To present ourselves, all that we are and have to God once and for all as a living sacrifice. And then also each day. As Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily [i.e., each day assume the position of a dead man, dead to self-control] and,” Jesus concluded, “follow Me” (Luke 9:23).

How are we doing here? How are you doing? How am I doing? You may have heard it said that the problem with living sacrifices is that they keep crawling off the altar. *The person who makes a difference assumes the position of being owned by Christ.*

Displays The Character Of Christ.

And that person also displays the character of Christ. We could unpack and settle down here for quite some time. We could explore the fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5, the exquisite picture of Christ’s humility in Philippians 2, we could slow down, and walk through the gospels to see His character in action.

What we *will* do this morning, is focus on just two examples of Christ-like character in Paul which we see in these two chapters. First, the character quality of being calm, even in great turmoil. After the *professionals* ignored Paul’s warning and continued on the voyage, Luke tells us beginning at 27:14,

“But before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind,

called Euraquilo; and when the ship was caught in it and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and let ourselves be driven along. Running under the shelter of a small island called Clauda, we were scarcely able to get the ship's boat under control. After they had hoisted it up, they used supporting cables in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on the shallows of Syrtis, they let down the sea anchor and in this way let themselves be driven along. The next day as we were being violently storm-tossed, they began to jettison the cargo; and on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. Since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned" (27:14-20).

These sailors and soldiers were tough, experienced men. But now fear was growing, gloom was descending, and panic was racing in their hearts. One person stood out in that group of 276 people. Not the ship's captain, not the Roman centurion, nor some wealthy businessman or important government official. But a prisoner, Paul.

When everyone had given up hope and had accepted that they were going to die, Paul stood up with true peace and calmly but emphatically gave God's message that while the ship would be wrecked, they all would survive. This calmness was part of Paul's character. The Holy Spirit had developed and deepened the peace of Christ in him. "The peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension" was guarding his heart and mind" (Philippians 4:7).

I know you may say, "But I'm not a calm person! I'm anxious, uptight! That's just the way I am!" Yes, that may be the way you are. But God wants to, can and will grow the character of Christ in you, including the supernatural ability to be calm. This requires following God's truth, His directions to us. In Philippians 4 Paul said the peace of God will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus and that the God of peace Himself will be with you as you give yourself to, and dwell on that which is true, honorable, right, pure, excellent and worthy of praise (*cf.* Philippians 4:5-9).

And so, the question again is, "How are we doing here?" Are we really seeking to have Christ's character in full bloom within us by following Him and His truth? Do we, and others see evidence of growth here, even if it be slowly? The person who makes a difference displays the character of Christ, including the supernatural ability to be calm, even in great turmoil.

The second example of Christ-like character in people who make a difference is being confident. Confident, even in great danger. In that violent, prolonged, life-threatening storm, Paul was not only *calm*, but also *confident*. *Confident in God*.

He listened to God, he believed what God told him. God told him he "must witness at Rome," and so Paul was confident that he would live to see Rome (23:11). God told him that while they would run aground and lose the ship, all aboard would survive (24:24). Paul listened and believed. Before you rush by this, pause and think about it. If you were in Paul's

place, a prisoner on that ship, knowing that even with your rare and valuable Roman citizenship, as a prisoner you had few rights, would you risk standing up and telling the sailors and soldiers...

- “You should have listened to men when I warned you not to set out from Crete. You didn’t, and so have now experienced all this trouble” (cf. 27:21).
- And, after saying that, go on to say, “But even though you blew it, take courage! Have courage because one of God’s angels told me earlier tonight that all of us will survive! That’s what is going to happen!” (cf. 27:22-25)

Would you have had the confidence to say these things? Paul was no Pollyanna optimist. He was bright, analytical and experienced. He knew that these men could have mocked him or even killed him.

Paul’s confidence was not in himself. It was *in God*. He knew that God never gets it wrong, let alone lies. He knew that when God spoke he needed to listen, whether it was a message of warning or hope. He knew that how others responded, what they thought of him or did to him was not the concern, but boldly speaking out for God was his concern.

To make a difference, we need to be confident in God, even in great danger. Who and where we are, the opportunities and storms of life—none of that changes this truth. We too need to know and live by the truth that God never gets it wrong. We too need the character of listening to God speak, whether it is a message of warning or hope. We too need the character of knowing that boldly obeying God is the issue, not what others think or how they respond.

The person who makes a difference displays the character of Christ—being calm, even in great turmoil; being confident, even in great danger.

Fulfills The Ministry Of Being A Servant Of Christ.

We begin with Paul’s claim to be a servant of Christ. Go back to the now familiar 23rd verse of chapter 27 where Paul spoke of “the God to whom I belong and *whom I serve*.” As I noted earlier, Paul identified himself in his letters as “a bond-servant of Christ Jesus.” Yes, he knew he was not his own; he was owned by God. And, because of that and his love for Christ, he was His bond-servant.

Paul did not succumb to using his knowledge, being an apostle or the leading pioneer missionary of the church to serve his own needs and desires. His ministry was a vehicle of one thing only—serving Christ. This was his position, his claim.

We don’t have the skills and positions Paul had, but God’s call to us in the same—to be servants of Christ, fulfilling the ministry He has for us. God has enabled and equipped every believer to be Christ’s servant. He has given each of us spiritual abilities for serving Him. Do you know what some of your’s are? Do you see yourself as, identify yourself as a *servant of Christ*? To make a difference, we need to see ourselves as, and then be Christ’s servants.

Of course, people claim to be things they are not. Ferdinand Waldo Demara. It is said that he was brilliant and had a photographic memory. He worked as a psychologist, civil engineer, attorney, surgeon (once on a Royal Canadian Naval destroyer in the Korean War), among many other professions—but without training or credentials for any of them. And so he became known as “*the Great Imposter*.” Yes, sometimes people claim to be things they are not.

What about Paul’s claim? We have seen more than enough evidence of Paul *being* a servant of Christ in the accounts Luke has provided here in Acts. He made difficult and dangerous journeys, endured ridicule and rejection, was imprisoned and beaten for all those years not to build a reputation or ministry empire, but to serve Christ, to fulfill his calling.

Back in chapter 9 God reassured the at first reluctant Ananias in Damascus to go to Paul by telling him, “... [Paul] is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and Kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.” (15-16)

Luke’s last times in the book of Acts are,

“And [Paul] stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.” (30-31)

And this was not the end for Paul or his ministry. It is commonly believed that he was released after the two years, probably because the Jewish leaders from Jerusalem did not show up to try to make their case against him. Paul then continued to minister until he was once again arrested and finally martyred as a servant of Christ.

God expects every believer to fulfill his/her position and call of being a servant of Christ. If someone were writing about you, and the account ended with today, would that record tell a compelling story, would it paint a clear picture of you fulfilling your ministry of being a servant of Christ in your home, work place, church and community?

God calls us and enables us. He also evaluates us. Listen to Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 4,

“Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.” (1-2)

And again, just a bit earlier in that letter,

“According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones,

wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." (3:10-15)

Conclusion.

The person who makes a difference ...

- Assumes the position of being owned by Christ.
- Displays the character of Christ.
- Fulfills the ministry of being a Servant of Christ.

All of us, each one of us could say, "I can't do all of this!" And if you do say that, you're absolutely correct. Let's go back to Paul, 2 Corinthians 2:15-17,

"...we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And *who is adequate for these things?* For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God."

Then, in the next chapter, Paul wrote,

"Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant ..." (3:5-6)

Paul couldn't do it. I can't do it. You can't do it. But God can and will. Yes, God "is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power [His power] that works within us" (Ephesians 3:20).

As you spend time responding to God now, thank God for His great love for you which, in Christ, saved you, purchased you to be His own. Choose to commit yourself to...

- assume to position of being owned by Christ each day, glorifying Him and blessing others;
- to continually grow in displaying Christ's character, glorifying Him and blessing others;
- to fulfill your ministry of being a servant of Christ, glorifying Him and blessing others.

If you've already made these decisions, confirm and renew them. Ask God to help you

see and respond to areas where you need to grow at this time.

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