

# Acts Highlights - Part 6

by George Verwer

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*The sermon highlights the importance of understanding God's will and being open to change, as seen in the story of Paul and Silas' journey to Macedonia and their experiences in prison.*

**Duration:** 33:21

**Topics:** "Book Of Acts"

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## Description

In this sermon, Leonard Ravenhill discusses the availability of powerful preaching and resources through technology, such as Redeemed TV, which offers free films that were previously costly. He emphasizes the importance of spreading the word and sharing the gospel with others, both in person and through various mediums like social media, literature, and film. Ravenhill encourages believers not to be discouraged by small numbers of people responding to the gospel, as God can work through even a few individuals. The sermon concludes with a reference to the book of Acts, highlighting the mixed responses to Paul's preaching on the resurrection, with some laughing, some wanting to hear more, and some becoming believers.

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## Transcript

It's a privilege once again to be with you looking into the book of Acts. Of course, I've been spending a lot of time restudying it and also using my commentary, which is actually in Spanish. Last night was an exciting night as I had this new phone, this smart phone.

I never had one of these. And I learned a few days ago that you can ask, you have a little Google, you can ask Google questions. And so last night, I asked, who is Oswald J. Smith, who's the second most influential person in my life.

Very well known back in those days, not so well known now. And immediately I had information about him. And soon I had Oswald J. Smith preaching on my phone.

Now that was before the age of video. So it must have been a film. It must have been a film of him that got transferred.

And now it's on the phone. Soon I was looking at Dr. Schaefer. Then I was looking at other speakers.

There's lots of Billy Graham. Pretty soon I was in sermonindex.net. And there's about 100 or more speakers. And another close friend of mine who's in heaven.

Soon I was listening to very powerful stuff by Leonard Ravenhill. So I know you can get the same thing on your laptop. But it's amazing what's available to us.

But those of us who know about these things, we need to spread the word. Because a lot of people don't know, for example, about Redeem TV, who are offering all these films that previously we had to pay 10 or 15 pounds or dollars for. Now they're all being offered free of charge.

So these are exciting days for learning how to get more when we're sort of locked in our own homes. But even more important to be able to share that with others. I just offered all my Facebook friends the opportunity to give me birthday greetings.

I'm 82 this Friday. And I've been to send 82 pounds or dollars or 820 or 8200 for the desperate crisis situation in India that I'm very much involved with. But let's get into the Book of Acts.

Father, we thank and praise you for answers to prayer. We thank you for so many people that are connecting with us through Zoom, through Facebook, and the old-fashioned telephone. And we thank you for the power of prayer.

We thank you for the emphasis on prayer we've seen in session after session, as we've looked in each chapter here in the Book of Acts. So look, Lord, help us now as we look into these three challenging, unique chapters we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

We're now in chapter 15. And before we read some of that, I want to give you my quote of the week. Each week I've given a quote from my old, very old Bible that I don't use anymore.

Put all these quotes and outlines in it 30, 40, 50 years ago. Quote of the day is from C.S. Lewis. It's very powerful.

The title is, To risk being hurt is to be vulnerable. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken.

If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies, little luxuries, avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket, the coffin of your own selfishness.

But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless and airless, it will change. It will not be broken. It will be unbreakable.

Impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside of heaven where you could be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is hell.

C.S. Lewis. With that in mind, we turn to the Book of Acts and we're immediately, in chapter 15, thrust into complexity and controversy because some of the Jewish converts were saying these new believers, even the Gentile believers, they now need to be circumcised. Chapter 15, verse 1. While Paul and Barnabas were at Antioch of Syria, some men from Judea arrived and began to teach the Christians.

Unless you keep the ancient Jewish customs of circumcision taught by Moses, you cannot be saved. Paul and Barnabas, disagreeing with them, argued forcefully and at length. Finally, Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem, accompanied by some local believers to talk to the apostles and elders about this

question.

The church sent the delegates to Jerusalem. They stopped along the way in Phoenicia and Samaria to visit the believers there. They told them much of one's joy, that the Gentiles were also being converted.

We don't have time to read the whole passage, but this reminds us that in our day and age, legalism is alive and well. I remember sitting in a church once, when I was a very young Christian, and the pastor, I guess, was upset that there weren't enough people coming to church. And I remember him saying that probably if you're not going to church, you'll probably not be saved.

I've heard of other people in India years ago, if you don't speak in tongues, you're not saved. There's this human tendency to add to the beautiful, pure gospel of Jesus. And here we see it, right in the very beginning of the church.

And we can learn from it, even though it's not our particular situation right now. So, this led us to the great Jerusalem meeting, when Paul presented his case to the leaders, and he won their hearts. And so, they agreed that the Gentiles, of course, could come to be saved, and they would not necessarily need to be circumcised.

It's really interesting because right at the beginning of chapter 16, when Paul is recruiting this outstanding young disciple, excuse me, Timothy, we read there in verse three, so Paul wanted him, Timothy, to join them on their journey in deference to the Jews of that area. In other words, to keep them happy and not have trouble with them. He arranged for Timothy to be circumcised before they left.

So, this seems like a complete contradiction to the victory he had just won in Jerusalem, that people did not need to be circumcised. But it also has a message of the word compromise, that sometimes on smaller issues, in order to get on with giving the message out, we have to compromise. And it's difficult, but I think the idea that we can always just get it 100% the way we think it should go is not always possible.

On the major doctrines of the faith, of course, it might be different. But as you can see, once again, we have examples of what I call messiology. I'm still hoping you're all gonna read that book.

But something else is very important before we go to chapter 16. Turn with me to verse 36 in chapter 15. After some time, Paul said to Barnabas, let's return to each city where we previously preached the word of the Lord to see how the believers are getting along.

Their concern for the new believers is so important. And a lot of our ministry today, and your ministry, is caring for new believers. The enemy, of course, was not happy about all this.

So, what do we read? Paul agreed. Barnabas agreed and wanted to take John Mark, but Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pomphylia and had not shared in their work. Their disagreement over this was so sharp that they separated.

Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed to Cyprus. Paul chose Silas. The believers sent them off, entrusting them to the Lord's grace.

So, they traveled throughout Syria and Cilicia to strengthen the churches there. Again, such a powerful message that sometimes great Christian leaders, somehow it doesn't work out. I've seen it all the time in

my years in ministry and read about it and heard about it.

And of course, it can be discouraging. But again, it's a beautiful example of what I call messiology. And though it was wrong, it didn't seem to be plan A, God surely worked through both of these leaders.

So, perhaps because Luke, who wrote this, was so close to Paul, he never said much more about Barnabas. There are many questions that the Bible doesn't answer. This idea that the Bible has the answer to every single question, especially as you move into modern science, is just ridiculous.

That's not what God's Word is about. The greatest thrust of God's Word, of course, is to bring the message of salvation, which we see so clearly in these passages we're studying even today. We go on to a very interesting event, the call of Paul to Macedonia.

And again, there now in chapter 16, verse 6, we have some very interesting lessons. Next, Paul and Silas traveled through the area of Phrygia and Galatia because the Holy Spirit had told them not to go into the province of Asia. At that time, then coming to the border of Mycenae, they headed to the province of Bithynia.

But again, the Spirit of Jesus did not let them go. Instead, they went through Mycenae to the city of Troas. This is important because many of us in our Christian life struggle to know God's will.

And we take what we think is one path, just as Paul, and then suddenly it doesn't work out. And so we take another path, which we think the Lord is guiding us, and maybe he was, but he was also testing us whether we're ready for sudden change, whether we can adjust to the difficulty of not ending up where we think we should be going. That can happen also in connection with our job.

I especially think of this Christian leader who was the pastor of the famous church, but he was offered a very, very important job within God's work. He's going to leave his church and take on that job. Meanwhile, the job fell through.

He didn't get it. Someone else got it. He was so discouraged.

Can I trust God? Will God guide? And he got discouraged. And during that discouragement, he had a moral failure with a woman, which the devil used to almost destroy him. Fortunately, after many, many problems, his marriage held together, and he recovered.

And God continued to use him in an amazing way, but oh, all that he went through. And the first issue wasn't really the sexual attraction. It was the disappointment with what he thought was God's will.

I remember even once in the station in Brussels being with Buck Singh, and he was convinced that God wanted him to speak to this particular person, but he didn't move fast enough, and the person was on the train and gone. And Brother Buck Singh never spoke to that person. So this is something we have to learn to absorb in our lives.

But through that, God got him to the place where he really wanted them. Look at verse 9. That night, Paul had a vision. He saw a man from Macedonia in northern Greece pleading with him, come over here and help us.

So we decided to leave for Macedonia at once, for we could only conclude that God was calling us to preach the good news here. Wow, what an amazing challenge. What an amazing story.

I sometimes have used this passage when I've tried to represent nations that are unreached, nations that I have spent time in, like Iraq and Turkey and Afghanistan. And so I've given a Macedonian call on behalf of those countries. And often I have seen some response.

I'm not sure if it was the right use of the scriptures, but I certainly love this passage. And the greatest message I ever heard preached from this passage was from Greg Livingston, who was with OM for many years, helped start the work in India. Some of you have read his book, You've Got Libya.

And then he became the founder, co-founder of Frontiers. But he had a tremendous message on this passage that I'll never, never forget. Well, when they get there to Macedonia, they meet this amazing woman, Lydia.

We'd like to spend a lot more time in this chapter, but there's just so much to cover. Lydia was quite a well-known woman from Thyatira. She was a merchant of expensive purple cloth that we read in verse 14.

As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart and she accepted what Paul was saying. She was baptized along with other members of her household and asked us to be her guests. If you agree, I am faithful to the Lord, she said.

Come and stay at my home. And she urged us until we did it. Again, a great message, because so often in this day and age, Christians and churches, they just put people in hotels.

There's no one in the whole church willing to have the visiting team visiting speakers in their home. I think of so many OM teams. Of course, we were fortunate they let us stay in the church on the floor, but not many would open their homes.

And we understand that. We're not judging people. Some people have a very tiny home.

This one country especially, I've been many times, hardly ever get in anybody's home. I don't know whether they're ashamed of their home or because they're poor. They have a false idea about Christian leaders.

Here we are way back in the book of Acts, this clear example, and these guys were more or less strangers. She only just came to Jesus. She didn't really know them.

And she invited them into the home. And we read later on, after a time of difficulties and imprisonment, they went back and stayed again with Lydia. It's interesting, the first full-time worker in Spain when we first went there way back in 1960, was a woman named Lydia.

A very special lady who later worked with us in Italy and married an American. And they've been living in Italy, sharing their faith ever since. So Lydia is a special name.

And then we go into this prison experience, which got kicked off because Paul cast this demon out of this person that was pursuing them and shouting. And after he did that, the mob got very, very angry. And so we picked up the story in verse 19.

Her master's hopes of wealth, this woman through her divination, she was making money for her so-called master. His plans were now shattered. So they grabbed Paul and Silas.

They dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace. The whole city is in an uproar because of these Jews they shouted. They're teaching the people to do things that are against Roman customs.

A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas. And the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. They were severely beaten and they were thrown into prison.

Again, I'm just reminded of people who are teaching that this kind of thing doesn't happen. God is a good God, and he only allows good things to happen to his people. And they then go into this extreme about God wanting to prosper everybody financially, God wanting to keep people in good health all the time.

I don't know when they're supposed to die. And this extreme so-called prosperity teaching is hurting a lot of believers, especially in Africa, but it's spreading in India and in some other countries as well. And as we read the book of Acts, that is just so completely challenged.

Because again and again, we see that believers face difficulties in trials, prayers don't seem to get answered. And of course, they end up in prison. But look what God did in prison.

Verse 25, around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. I remember when I was arrested by the Soviets for distributing Christian literature way back in the days of the Cold War. And we were under lock and key and guarded.

And I remember one of the main things we did was sing hymns. In fact, one of the Russians guarding us, he really wanted to learn that particular hymn, which was quite an amazing experience. So they're singing hymns and praising God.

And we have to rush through the story. But soon through an earthquake, they were set free. And of course, this really frightened the jailer.

And he was trembling with fear. Verse 29, trembling with fear, the jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down before Paul and Silas. He brought them out and asked, Sir, what must I do to be saved? We had a great Christian leader back when I was living in Chicago and at Moody Bible Institute.

I visited him only once, John R. Rice. And he had a booklet, a clear salvation booklet. What must I do to be saved? I think Ray Lynch, who eventually visited every nation in the world, I'm sure some of you know him, an elderly brother now in California, lived much of his life on our ship in Israel, in Malta, preached thousands and thousands and thousands of times in the open air.

But I think he came to Christ partly through that booklet. What must I do to be saved? And of course, it comes right from the book of Acts. They replied, believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved along with your entire household.

This is the message that we have, that we take into the streets, we take into the homes, we take into Zoom and the Internet, in literature, in spoken form and film. And let us never depart from declaring the basic gospel of grace of our Lord Jesus. Then they shared the word of the Lord with him and all who lived in his household.

That same hour, the jailer washed their wounds and he and everyone in his household was immediately baptized. Then he brought them into his house, set a meal before them. He and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God.

What a great conversion. What a great conversion. And it just reminds me that in these days, many are involved in prison ministry.

It's one of the first things I did as a young Christian at Marylebone College before I ever went to Mexico, before I went to Moody. I got involved in the local jail, saw quite a few come to Christ. And one of them got put to the state penitentiary in Nashville.

And here, even though I was only 19, I had the opportunity to speak in that prison in Nashville. And I've always had this strong burden for prison ministry. We've never been able to get into it the way that I dreamed, though we have been involved through the ship, partnering usually with others who are in prison ministry.

And here in Britain, I visited many prisons, ministered even in a woman's prison, which was such a powerful experience to see these women experiencing conversion and worshiping the Lord. So what a great challenge we have there. Later on, we see how the officials discovered that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens.

None of this beating, none of this prison should have been allowed. And that, of course, changed their whole course. And eventually, of course, they would be sent to Rome.

But as we move on to Chapter 17, with our short amount of time, we come to Paul going to Berea, Paul and Silas in Berea. And one of the things that blesses me as I read about the Bereans is how they search the Scriptures day after day. Pick it up at verse 11.

The people of Berea were more open-minded than in Thessalonica. And we'll discover in our ministry, some people are more open than others. We often pray, Lord, lead us to those who are open, because, you know, we only have so many hours in the day.

So soon, they went to Berea. Let's just read that again. They listened eagerly to Paul's message.

They searched the Scriptures day after day to check up on Paul and Silas to see if they were really teaching the truth. As a result, many Jews believed, as did some of the prominent Greek women and many men. But when some of the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God in Berea, they went there and stirred up trouble.

The believers acted at once, sending Paul onto the coast while Silas and Timothy remained behind. Those escorting Paul went with him to Athens, and they returned to Berea with a message for Silas and Timothy to hurry and join him. We don't have time to look extensively into Paul's ministry in Athens, but he was facing these philosophers, Epicureans and Stoics.

The Epicureans were kind of, you know, just take it easy and relax, don't need to do anything, just enjoy life. The Stoics were just the opposite, that we must be ready, life is hard, we must grim, you know, grin and bear it no matter what comes our way, not show too much emotion or get involved or try to be happy. And Paul tried to adjust his message.

And it's interesting how different commentators reflect on this passage. Some of them even say this is Paul's method of preaching in which he really tried to adjust to speaking to philosophers with his language, that this was a compromise. And they point out, and I read it again this morning in Spanish, they point out that, well, he didn't really get much results there.

I don't think I'm in that camp. I'm more in the camp that we need to somehow know who we're speaking to and get on their level and communicate with them. I believe that's one of the reasons God so mightily used his servant, Rami Zacharias, who's recently gone to be with the Lord.

We had the privilege of seeing one of our main OM leaders become a major leader in that movement, Stuart McAllister, still alive and being greatly used. But they had the ability to speak to intellectuals, to speak to philosophers. And we have a number of people in Europe, like John Lennox, who can go into university scenes and face philosophers.

They always bring out the gospel, but they may bring it out in a different way. And I believe there is a place for apologetics. Maybe you don't know that word, but it simply means defending the faith.

It speaks in the book of John about defending the faith. And so, especially these days, when sometimes very gifted people are attacking the Bible, they're writing books against the Bible. We thank the Lord for men of great intellect, like John Stott.

Of course, he's with the Lord. Lloyd Jones is with the Lord. John Lennox is still with us.

But there are many other younger men and women. Some of them are university graduates, and God uses them often to reach people that some of us would never get to. And again, it's a challenge to be more faith-hearted in the way that we see God work and what God accomplishes.

It really is a lesson, I believe, for all of us. And then we finish this chapter reading from verse 32. When they heard Paul speak of the resurrection of a person who had been dead, some laughed, and others said, we want to hear more about this later.

That ended Paul's discussion with them. But some joined him and became believers. Among them, Dionysius, a member of the council, and a woman named Damaris, and others.

So there was some fruit. And sometimes in our ministry, and this has especially been true for us in places like Afghanistan, and Turkey, and Iraq, and Iran, and Libya, and these places where we've been working for a long time, sometimes the numbers who respond are very small. We must not allow that to discourage us, because we never know what God will do through those few who come to Jesus.

Well, we've looked at three more chapters in the book of Acts. I wonder if there's anyone that has followed us through all six of these sessions. I just love to hear from people, and I make my email quite well known.

I think you can read that. And I answer every email personally. I wanted to just close by mentioning one of my books in which I touch on some of the same biblical principles that we find in the book of Acts.

It's one of my earlier books called No Turning Back. And it's all about running and keep on running. No turning back.

And I shared some of the basics of the discipline of spiritual life, foundation for spiritual life, fruitfulness, getting out of the fog. I talk about the devil's fog that keeps us from being effective. So, again, I'd love to send that to you with other books as a gift.

Let us pray together. Father, we thank you for this book of Acts, Acts of your Holy Spirit. We thank you for what we can learn from these three chapters.

Each chapter is such a unique story and such an amazing way that we see you working, sorting out problems through that meeting at the Jerusalem Council so that it was clear that Gentiles would be completely welcomed into the church by grace alone, not by rules and regulations or even by being circumcised. We thank you for that important prison experience where the whole family comes to know you. How we long in our work to see whole families come to faith.

And we know in some cultures, it's not so individualistic as we in the West. And so often it's either the whole family or sometimes nobody. And so give us wisdom as we adjust to different cultural situations, which we especially have seen in India.

We ask for grace now as we move into our own ministry and into our own work that whatever we do, when we do it heartily as unto you, for we ask in Jesus name. Amen.

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