

Acts E6 Final

Paul's Journey to Jerusalem

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Jon: Hi, this is Jon at The Bible Project. Today on the podcast, we're continuing a conversation we started a while ago, looking at the story of Acts. The book of Acts is a continuation of the book of Luke. Actually, Tim and I have been discussing Luke and Acts for a while now, because we made a series of videos, a nine-part series that walk through the ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, and then the continued ministry of Jesus through his apostles in the book of Acts.

In the last section of the book of Acts, we really focus in on one character. When we first meet the Apostle Paul, he's a faithful Israelite, a zealous follower of Yahweh, and he's not happy about this new movement of people who think Jesus is king of Israel. But then Paul has a radical encounter with the risen Jesus, he turns his life over to him and he finds that it's his calling to take the message of Jesus outside of Israel to the entire world.

This guy's gone from persecuting Christians to starting Christian churches. Everywhere he goes, he tries to break down racial and economic barriers. Every city he leaves, he leaves behind him these new communities of radically generous people, but in every city he also creates a lot of enemies.

Tim: His reputation is growing as a controversial figure. He doesn't fit anybody's categories.

Jon: So Paul, he's gone on three distinct missionary journeys in the book of Acts to spread the news about Jesus.

Tim: While he's out on his third missionary journey, he begins to feel like Jesus through the Spirit is guiding him to go back to Jerusalem.

Jon: You see, there's been a famine in Jerusalem, and the whole city has been hit hard. And that means the disciples of Jesus, the first church is suffering. So, Paul takes it on himself to collect money from Jesus followers from all over the world, and then to bring that money to the Christians in Jerusalem. This gift was a sign of unity for the global church.

Tim: Paul put enormous amount of energy thought a whole season of his missionary career into this fundraising effort, and then transporting the money and taking it to city where he knows it's loaded with people who want to kill him. So it just raises the question, what does he think he's doing?

Jon: So today, we look at Paul's journey back to Jerusalem. Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

All rights. We took a long break from Acts.

Tim: It feels like a long time ago.

Jon: But we hadn't finished.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: We even kind of said it was finished. I remember on the podcast in one of the intros it was like, "It's the last part of Acts," which is not true.

Tim: Oh, nope.

Jon: It was the last part for the time.

Tim: Here we are talking about it again. The Act video series will be four videos when it's all complete. And so, this conversation, Jon and I are discussing the themes of Acts part four that's going to represent the book of Acts chapters 21 to 28, which is about Paul's journey to Jerusalem, what happens there, how he gets arrested, and then held up in a series of trials and mistrials for years that land him on a boat towards Rome, that shipwrecks and then he ends up in house arrest in Rome. And the book of Acts concludes.

Jon: That's the roadmap.

Tim: That's the roadmap but it's the culmination. I mean, this is like the climactic movement of the epic story that began with Jesus announcing the good news about the kingdom and his risen sovereignty over the nations would be announced in Jerusalem and to Judea and Samaria, and unto the ends of the earth.

Jon: And that's the roadmap for the whole book of Acts that we've been using.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: So quick summary would be, Jesus gets with his disciples, tells them, "Hey, get ready." They're like, "When's it going to happen?" He's like, "Get ready. Buckle up."

Tim: "It's about to start. Game time."

Jon: Then he says, "You're going to take this message out into Judea and Samaria.

Tim: It's Jerusalem first, then the next region out.

Jon: And then to the ends of the earth.

Tim: Ends of the earth. Yeah.

Jon: And we looked at the movement of the Christians in Jerusalem. Some of what it was like to be following the way of Jesus in that city.

Tim: In his first months in Jerusalem.

Jon: And then that introduced the character of Paul at the end of that video.

Tim: Yeah, the outbreak of violence against the followers of Jesus.

Jon: Because they were looking like just the Jewish cult that—

Tim: Yeah. Drinking the Kool-Aid.

Jon: And that was a threat. We actually talked at length about how trying to get into the psyche of Paul, not to just throw them under the bus.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: I mean, he wasn't doing nice things to them, but he was protecting.

Tim: He believed he was protecting Israel's faithfulness to their covenant with God. Just like Moses and Aaron and Samuel and the prophets, he's standing in that tradition.

Jon: But then he has an encounter with the risen Jesus as he goes to another city to try to find more disciples to throw down on.

Tim: The second video.

Jon: So we're into the second video and he—

Tim: And the second movement of Acts.

Jon: And the second movement of Acts. He then goes there and ends up just becoming part of the whole thing.

Tim: Yes. Peter's the key leader in focus in the Jerusalem section of Acts. And then in the second section of Acts, it's Paul and Peter in Tandem are both representatives and their stories are representing how even within now Judea and Samaria, the next ring out, more and more non-Jewish people are starting to give their allegiance to Jesus. And Paul and Peter kind of are involved in that expansion.

Then the section ends with Paul, helping lead the first international Jesus community up in Antioch.

Jon: Antioch.

Tim: Antioch.

Jon: So that's home base now?

Tim: Yeah, home based for the international missionary movement.

Jon: For all the action that's going to happen in the third section, third movement, which is then to the ends of the earth.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Which this is the Roman Empire, and so it's easier to get around because of the Roman roads, and Paul just hits the road and he goes from town to town proclaiming that Jesus is king.

Tim: Synagogue first, and then he hits the marketplace, where it's just anybody who will listen. He'll grab their air and start telling them about Jesus.

Jon: Cool. All right. That was a good little refresher. Paul, where we left him is he's seen a lot, he's gone through a lot. He's on his third trip.

Tim: That's right. And his reputation is growing as a controversial figure. He doesn't fit anybody's categories. Is he a Jewish monotheist who fits into that category in the eyes of the Romans? They know what to do with Jews.

Jon: They've been dealing with them.

Tim: Yeah, they've given them certain legal and tax exemptions to live by their religious customs. That's how most of the early Christians would appear to the Roman neighbors is as Jewish, but they're talking about this dead man who's alive from the dead - they claim. And also, he's portraying this risen from the dead as a rival king to Caesar, but he's not trying to start a guerrilla military operation, but he's saying there's another king. Who is this guy? He just didn't fit both Jewish or Roman kind of social category.

Jon: It'd be like someone walking around telling people on the street like, "Hey, I'm the mayor of Portland." Or maybe like, "My friend is the mayor of Portland."

Tim: Yeah, "My friend's the mayor of Portland." And they're asking like, "Wait. There was an election? When did the election happen?"

Jon: "What are you talking about?" And they're like, "Keep an eye on this guy."

Tim: They are like, "No, actually, he is alive from the dead. That's what made him the mayor."

Jon: "You killed him and he's alive and he's the mayor. So we should all really care about what he wants out of us and not the mayor. But the mayor is a cool dude too. Respect him."

Tim: That's right. My friend who is the real mayor, who isn't from the dead, actually has the wellbeing of everybody, including the guy who thinks he's the mayor in mind."

Jon: "And he's only the mayor because my mayor allows him."

Tim: It's becoming silly, but that's the analogy. That's good.

Jon: And everyone's like, "Okay, I guess—"

Tim: "What do we do with this guy?"

Jon: And then it's like, "Maybe you're crazy, but then it's like you're not crazy because I could have these really intelligent conversations with you, you're living in these really beautiful ways, you're respected amongst your peers."

Tim: Yeah, that's right. The poor are taken care of in these communities that Paul's helping plant. But also weird social distortions, like we're slaves, and their masters eat at the same table when they gather to worship this dead man who's risen from the dead. That's very disturbing.

Jon: Very counter-cultural.

Tim: You don't do that. That's going to short circuit everything.

Jon: My son goes to a Waldorf School and I went on a field trip with him. And his teacher and I are talking, he's like, "How's this project going?" And I was telling about the Acts videos because we were in the middle of writing one or something.

He's not a Christian, and he goes, "Yeah, I've been wondering about that. Like why was the Christian early church so persecuted?" He's like, "I'm familiar with the sayings of Jesus, and they're like, "I don't know why anyone would hate on them."

Tim: That's fascinating.

Jon: So that was his question. Like, "Why wouldn't people like him? Why wouldn't people like Paul walking around and talking—

Tim: Saying, "Love your neighbor as yourself? Who gets killed for saying that kind of thing?"

Jon: "Who gets killed for saying that kind of thing?" And we had been talking about it so I was like, "Oh, well, he was saying Caesar is king and that's actually a threat to the—

Tim: Jesus is the king.

Jon: Sorry, yeah.

Jon: And it's the same language as Caesar's King so it was a political kind of threat. It didn't seem like that really landed for him. Just kind of was like, "I don't know. Who cares?" I think I was wondering if he was thinking himself, "Maybe they were actually doing some sketchy things. Maybe they actually like weren't so rad. Maybe that's why they were—

Tim: Oh, you think he's wondering if there's an untold story that's unrepresented in the New Testament?

Jon: Yeah, maybe. Because it doesn't seem to add up at first glance why would Paul be hated so much? Why would then the early communities be hated so much?

Tim: Well, as that's what we're seeing, and it's going to continue. The theme in the missionary journeys is going to continue here. The majority of this fourth section of Acts is essentially, Paul feeling like he has to go to Jerusalem to accomplish a mission that we're going to talk about, and he gets arrested there.

Then the whole rest of the book of Acts from basically chapter 21 on through the end is Paul on a stage six times before some Roman Imperial representative, where he gets accused, he gives a speech, and then his speech convinces everybody that this guy isn't a threat, but he is a threat. He's not a threat militarily...

Jon: Like a typical type of threat.

Tim: ...but he is a threat socially. "What do we do with someone who's trying to promote a way of life that undermines the whole social order of our culture but who isn't using violent force to do it?" That's the paradox.

And Luke's trying to really craft that portrait of this third way that we've been exploring in lots of different videos and conversations. It's very similar of the way of the exile. It's not revolt, but it's not just assimilation or accommodation. It's resistance through non-violent doing of good deeds and creating these upside-down kingdom communities. That'll continue in our portrait of Paul.

But there's also some unique things in the section that I think will give us some good material to add some new things to the video.

Jon: Sweet.

[00:13:43]

Tim: Okay. Paul's finishing his third missionary journey. Luke traces kind of three large journeys circles that Paul does through Asia Minor into Greece, what we call Turkey today, and then into Greece, and then he ends up back and Antioch. He does these cycles. Each time planting a few more churches, or visiting churches he's already planted and so on.

While he's out on his third missionary journey, he begins to feel like Jesus through the Spirit is guiding him to go back to Jerusalem. So three different times - I'll just reference these real quick once you see him in sequence.

In chapter 19, right after the riot in Ephesus, when all the idol makers of the Artemis statue—

Jon: And they kick him out and they think he's dead.

Tim: Oh, no, that's earlier. The riot starts because of Paul's church communities that he's begun and everybody stopped buying idols, and they're starting to feel it in the local economy. And so, they started this protest, it turns into a riot, and Paul wants to go into the Colosseum where there's thousands of people who would like to kill him. So his friends, keep him back.

So right after that whole thing finishes, Acts 19:21, it says, "Paul, set in the spirit - and there's some ambiguity with whether he said it because of this Holy Spirit or that he's setting his purpose in his own spirit.

Jon: Ambiguous.

Tim: It's ambiguity. It's ambiguous. "But he set in the spirit to go to Jerusalem. After passing through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, 'after I go to Jerusalem, I'm on to Rome.'" He's a man on a mission. So you're like, "Oh, okay, he's going to Jerusalem now. That's interesting."

Jon: Which he hasn't been to since he left?

Tim: Correct. In the narrative, since he went up to Antioch, he's only been back one time, which was for the council in Jerusalem about whether non-Jewish followers of Jesus should be circumcised and so on.

In chapter 20, the next chapter, Paul decided to sail past Ephesus so that he wouldn't have to spend time in Asia, because he's hurrying to get to Jerusalem, if possible, by Pentecost. Obviously, that reminds you all the way back to the key event of Pentecost.

Jon: When this whole thing started.

Tim: So Paul wants to get into Jerusalem on a symbolic feast day. The story of Jesus starts ringing in our ears here of timing your arrival on important pilgrimage feast day. A few sentences later, he's speaking to the elders of Ephesus.

Look at how he presents this. He says, "And now behold, I am bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, I don't know what will happen to me there except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me." Which will keep a normal person away. But for Paul—

Jon: "I know what's going to happen, but there's going to be bonds of affliction."

Tim: That's right. So clearly, Luke's laying a trail here. Paul's got a thing to go to Jerusalem. He's certain that God's calling him.

Jon: He's got a hankering.

Tim: So what's the backstory here. We haven't really talked about this theme. It's come up one other time in Acts, but it plays a really significant role in the season of Paul's life. He talks about it a lot in a number of his letters, this mission to Jerusalem. So these materials in Acts corresponds to things that we know from his letters to the Corinthians and to the Romans and Galatians.

So this is a huge theme. I think this is a cool opportunity in this video. I kind of would like to make it a major piece of Paul's mission to Jerusalem, what he was doing and the symbolic significance that he saw in it. And essentially, it's this.

So all the way back in Acts, chapter 11, we begin to hear about a wave of famines and food shortages that were actually hitting the entire region. So while Paul and Barnabas were up in Antioch, and they heard about the followers of Jesus down in Jerusalem, the many of them are starving, they didn't have money, so even back then, way first off in Paul's first years as a follower of Jesus, they organized a big financial gift. So think how this works. Jerusalem's a mother church. It's where it all began.

Jon: It's where it all started, yeah.

Tim: And now you have this growing international community of Jesus' followers way up north. They are the daughter church, so to speak. And now they're the one sending and supporting the Jewish community of the mother church in Jerusalem. So this is from Acts 11. Do you want to read it just so you can get it in our head?

Jon: Acts 11:27-30. "Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and began indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brothers living into Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders." So that was the first one?

Tim: That was the first one. Again, we want to imagine ourselves into that setting. This is a small first generation religious social movement.

Jon: And it's completely Jewish in Jerusalem?

Tim: Mostly.

Jon: Because if you weren't Jewish, you probably wouldn't be living in Jerusalem?

Tim: No, it was a Roman city...

Jon: Lots of other people.

Tim: ...but the Jesus movement there at first consisted of almost entirely of Jewish people. Imagine the symbolic significance of two Jews, Paul and Barnabas, but also with the delegation of like a Greek, a Macedonian, a Cypriot, a Roman, and they're bringing all of this money that has Caesar's image on it - You know what I mean? - down to meet the needs. And there was unity. It seems like there was unity. But just the symbolic significance of the daughter movement that's now expanded into new cultural territory is now supporting. It's a very powerful symbolic statement happening there.

Jon: "Look at how much bigger this thing you are part of is and we're all in this together."

Tim: That's right. That experience seems to have shaped something really deep in Paul's heart because he brings it up years later when Paul went to Jerusalem to meet with the Jewish elders, which seems to be James, Peter and John. He talks about this in Galatians 2, where he has that showdown with Peter.

Peter came up to Antioch and he started eating kosher and wouldn't eat with people who weren't circumcised." And Paul got was so mad. He's just like, "What?"

Jon: Because Peter lived in Jerusalem?

Tim: He lived in Jerusalem.

Jon: He was just visiting Antioch.

Tim: He was checking things out. What Paul says is that some representatives who took the hardline, for say Christians who believe that followers of Jesus should be circumcised, they roll into Antioch, and then Peter changes his tune. And Paul's just like, "This is inconsistent on so many levels." Read Galatians. That's what Galatians is all about.

So he goes down to Jerusalem, they iron it out and James, Peter and John are like, "Yeah, Paul, you're right. Peter shouldn't have done that." What they do is they do this division of labor. This is in Galatians 2. Paul says, "James, Cephas, that's Peter and John, who were reputed to be pillars in the community, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship." Yep, you guys are legit.

Jon: Wait. So Cephas is Peter?

Tim: Cephas is Peter, yeah.

Jon: How am I supposed to know that?

Tim: Oh, well, from the Gospels, when Jesus says, "Your name is Cephas but you will be called Petrus."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: What's funny is Cephas is the word rock in Aramaic. Petrus is the word rock in Greek. So his name is "Rocky" either way. What the leaders in Jerusalem say to Paul and Barnabas is, "You go to the Gentiles, we'll focus on the Jewish community. Only they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do." And he doesn't just mean the poor in general. They're talking about fact that the Jerusalem church is still destitute and doesn't have any money. Because he's going to talk continually from this point on—

Jon: They are specifically he's saying, "Remember the poor in Jerusalem."

Tim: What they mean is, "Remember us here. As you're out there starting churches and these..."

Jon: "Don't forget about the little guys."

Tim: ...and these wealthy urban centers, don't forget about the mother Church and that we're hurting for funds down here."

Jon: "Don't forget where you came from."

Tim: There was some diplomacy happening here in this scene. It's very interesting to think about.

Jon: I've always read that as "just remember the poor everywhere." And you think through context, this is specifically about Jerusalem?

Tim: Yeah. Look right below that. He describes the same moment in Romans 15. At the end of Romans, he says, "Now, I was going to come to you, Romans." Early in the letter, he said this, but he says, "But now - chapter 15 - I'm going to go to Jerusalem. I'm going to serve the saints, the believers in Jerusalem for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do so, and actually, they're indebted to them."

In other words, these non-Jewish Christians around the world have an obligation. That's what he believes. They're indebted to these Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. "If the Gentiles have shared in the spiritual things of the Jerusalem Christians, then they are obligated, indebted to minister to the Jewish Christians also the material things." So the poor in Jerusalem, that seems to be the focus for Paul.

Then at the end of Romans, he says again just like he does in Acts, he says, "Listen, I'm going to Jerusalem." He says, "Pray for me." This is in chapter 15 vs 30 and 31. "Pray that I might be rescued from the disobedient in Judea that my service in Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints." He's raising money. Paul's a fundraiser. He's the development officer.

Jon: For Christianity, for the poor in Jerusalem.

Tim: He talks about this in the end of his letter to the Corinthians too.

Jon: Wait. What does he mean by "I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea"?

Tim: He's referring to people disobedient to the Messiah.

Jon: People who are getting on board.

Tim: Yeah, people who have rejected Jesus as Messiah. Precisely the people who are going to arrest him and try and kill him in Jerusalem. He knows he's walking into that.

Jon: So he's asked for two different things, I guess.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Pray for protection, and that my service for Jerusalem may be accepted to the saints.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: And that service for Jerusalem, that's the offering?

Tim: It's the gift.

Jon: Cool.

Tim: Once you radars up for it, you realize Paul's talking about this a lot.

Jon: It's on his mind a lot.

Tim: A lot. This was a huge, huge, big, big deal for him.

Jon: To go back to Jerusalem with some cash.

Tim: Yeah, loads of cash. Think of what that involved in the ancient world. They didn't do money orders.

Jon: He's going to carry it.

Tim: You got to carry it. In 2 Corinthians he talks about the crew that he had with him - all these different representatives in churches. Imagine.

Jon: There's this guy, Chris in Portland who has this blog called "The Art of Nonconformity." I don't know if he's still doing or not, but at first, it was all about his goal is to travel around the world and visit every country. Have you heard of this guy?

Tim: No.

Jon: He's in Portland. He kind of became international kind of blogger. So he was always trying to find ways to get airline points and stuff to be able to fly places. One of his schemes was, he got a credit card and the credit card gives you points when you buy things. He read the fine print and he realized he was able to buy...he bought gold coins with the credit card. And then the gold coins were delivered to his house, I guess, because then he had to take the gold coins the bank to turn it back in for money to pay off the credit card.

So he's telling a story about he doesn't have a car, that he's got a walk this bag of gold coins to the bank. And he said a bag of gold coins is actually really heavy. And maybe he had two or something. Now that I'm thinking about it, maybe it was three because whatever it was, he said he had to walk like five feet, put down a bag, go back, grab another one, and then walk because he couldn't carry them all at the same time.

Tim: What?

Jon: Anyway, sorry. Carrying a lot of money is sketchy A homeless guy came helped him.

Tim: Wow.

Jon: He let him borrow his cart.

Tim: Fascinating.

Tim: Well, there you go. Paul had people help him carry—

Jon: Loads of cash.

Tim: Load of cash.

Jon: That's dangerous.

Tim: Super dangerous.

Jon: But he really wanted to do it.

Tim: Yeah. We're trying to paint the picture. Paul put an enormous amount of energy, thought a whole season of his missionary career into this fundraising effort, and then transporting the money and taking it to a city where he knows it's loaded with people who want to kill him. So it just raises the question, what does he think he's doing?

Jon: You got to be a pretty influential guy to be able to go to a city in kind of the middle or wherever, and convince people to give you money. And then you're going to go then travel hundreds of miles away and deliver it to someone else, and then to pull it off. It's pretty entrepreneurial.

Tim: It is. It's a remarkable achievement of this career that often is underemphasized. Because it's so autobiographical within his letters. So he's going to take it to Jerusalem, and he's going to get trapped, and he's going to get arrested and beaten, and it's all going to go south, apparently. Just like he thought it would.

But I just want to pause for a minute, because I think so much of the videos and the themes of the book have been about the expansion of the Jesus community to include people of all nations spread to the ends of the earth. The way Paul talks about this gift, the symbolic significance that he felt it had, it's about that very same thing.

For Paul, the unity of the Jesus communities across ethnic, social, political, gender, every boundary that humans set up to create status and power differentials, Paul believed those all are just level before King Jesus.

Jon: Right. There's no slave or free—

Tim: Exactly, the famous thing. That's right. No, that's very important lines. No barbarian, Scythians, which were Roman ways of referring to the uncivilized people groups. They're just humans.

Jon: Like this classism doesn't exist.

Tim: That's right. So for Paul, the unity of these communities was crucially important symbol. It was built into the structure of the churches as an announcement of the unified human family in the one human Jesus. It seems like for Paul, this gift of the non-Jewish churches to the Jewish church became this token, the symbol, a sign of new creation of the unity of Jews and non-Jewish in the kingdom of Jesus. He seems to have cared about it that much.

Jon: It represents to him the fruit of what he'd been working towards, which is not only will there be Gentile, non-Jewish Jesus communities but that they'll be united. And here is that come into fruition.

Tim: Yes, that's right. That they'll care for each other, they'll make each other's problems their own problems. Yeah, they share with each other.

Jon: That's an ambitious dude.

Tim: Right? I mean, talk about an idealist. People weren't doing this. Like nobody's doing this. The only thing that unifies the Roman Empire right now is the Roman propaganda and—

Jon: People are traveling around during this time and they are buying and selling stuff.

Tim: It's a melting pot.

Jon: They're all sorts of reasons. It's so fascinating that his story turns on a dime and then he's just so all in. It's like he's like, "I'm going to stop this movement." And then all sudden, it's like, "Nope, I'm going to help expand this movement and I'm going to help make sure that this movement is unified across all of these cultural boundaries, and I'm going to consider it an honor to suffer for the sake of this movement."

Tim: Yeah. He'll endure suffering and inconvenience to perform one mighty symbolic action.

Jon: Yeah. Because he could have lived a long life likely if he just would have stayed out of Jerusalem.

Tim: Yeah, he could have stayed planting churches, cruising around.

Jon: He could have sent someone else with that cash.

Tim: That's right. As we're going to see, his journey to Jerusalem, especially Luke, the way Luke has designed and portrayed the narrative, he has laid the story and journey to Jerusalem of Paul right on top of his depiction of Jesus's journey to Jerusalem, and the terrible things that happened there. He concludes Luke that way, the story of Jesus, and he concludes Acts that way.

As we're going to see, it's like intentional down to the very words and scenes. He's portraying this action of Paul unifying the Jewish and non-Jewish communities as another Jesus type of Act that brings the kingdom of God in a new way.

[00:33:19]

Tim: I do think, just to kind of close the loop on this point, why Paul goes to Jerusalem, what this gift meant to him, is the letter to the Ephesians. If you were to try and give a summary of Paul's message, Ephesians would be one of the best candidates of a short, concise statement of what he was all about. The main theme of letter is about God joining Jew and non-Jewish people together into the new humanity.

So think about what the gift means to him when he says things like this. This is from Ephesians 2. He says, "But now in the Messiah, Jesus, you who were formerly far off, he's referring to non-Jewish, you have been brought near." That's precisely language of coming into the temple precincts. "You've been brought near by the blood of the Messiah, for he himself is our peace who made the two one." He's referring to family of Israel.

Jon: And everyone else.

Tim: "He broke down the barrier of the dividing wall by abolishing in his flesh, the enmity, the Torah, of commandments in the ordinances so that in himself he might make the two into one new humanity making peace." That's perfectly clear. This typical sentence of Paul's just crams it all in here. This gets us into the stuff we'll explore one day in our Paul trilogy.

Jon: The laws of the Torah, all the laws that God gave Israel to be the covenant partners.

Tim: The terms of the covenant. And so they're good. Yeah, they're good. But tragically and paradoxically, Israel's rebellion against the covenant and breaking those terms of the covenant actually ended up isolating Israel from the nations and creating hostility between Israel and their neighbors. And what is the Old Testament? One long story of Israel's hostility against their neighbors. And so, what Jesus does as he takes the consequences of Israel's covenant violations into himself for policy—

Jon: Is that the enmity?

Tim: That's the meaning of the cross. Yeah, that's right. The enmity between Jew and non-Jew and the consequences of exile and subjugation that Israel experienced. Jesus went ahead of Israel and suffered exile and subjugation to a foreign power on the cross. And in so doing, removed the reason for hostility between Jew and non-Jew so that they can be joined in the new humanity. This is so dense. This is Paul's theology of justification and of the family of Abraham.

So in his mind, the laws of the Torah, no longer define membership in the family of the Messiah. Rather, it's simply faith and trust in the Messiah.

Jon: Well, that's a rabbit hole I suppose.

Tim: It is. It totally is. My point here is just for Paul, what mattered is that Jew and non-Jew becoming one new human—

Jon: That's a big deal for him.

Tim: For him, that's everything.

Jon: That's interesting because I would assume that for Paul, everything is get people saved. That's the language, right?

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Which is precisely what he means by that. He save by becoming part of the Messiah's family. But he's a Jewish Messiah. So do you have to become Jewish to get into the Messiah's family and be saved? That's it. You're talking about something even more abstracted.

Jon: Even more abstracted, which we've talked ad nauseum about, which is, he wasn't walking around saying, "Hey, what are you going to tell God when you get into heaven when you die? Let me give you the password."

But the thing you care the most about was that people who couldn't be a part of the covenant family of God for all of these centuries now can be and that this will be a unified new movement, but it won't just be Jewish. That was his main ideal. He

cared about that so much. He would travel around to all of these cities, to all these different cultures and ethnicities and start Jesus communities there and make sure they're connected. And they know about each other and that they all care about the roots.

Tim: That's right. So check out the step he takes next. This is in Ephesians 3. Think about a passionate religious person. Passionate religious people believe that their normal everyday behaviors are charged with cosmic meaning. I think that's what it means. To be a passionate follower of Jesus, it's to like, my day to day life is fit into a cosmic storyline that gives my everyday behaviors meaning and significance.

So listen to this paragraph of Paul, and you can see what he thinks something like his gift to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem means in light of a cosmic drama. He says in Ephesians 3:8, "To me, the very least of all saints - I mean, I used to get other Christians arrested - to me, this grace was given to announce to the Gentiles, the unfathomable riches of the Messiah, and to bring to light God's administration of this mystery that for ages has been hidden in God who created all things, so that the multifaceted wisdom of God - he talks about God's wisdom like a diamond - the multi-faceted wisdom of God might be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavens."

Jon: "So that God's wisdom might be known.

Tim: He writes long sentences, man.

Jon: ...through the church rulers and authorities."

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Basically, like the heavenly beings can then see.

Tim: Remember our whole conversation about the sons of God in the book of Genesis, angelic powers that God appointed over the nation, the Divine Council? All that stuff.

Jon: He's thinking about that.

Tim: He's thinking about it. It's the idea that the divided hostile condition of human nations, the way that they separate and create national identities that compete with each other, they conquer and hate each other just for the mere fact that you're not of my people group. That's the human condition. Tribalism, whatever. Call it what you want.

For Paul, that is exhibit A of humanity's imprisonment to dark, really dark, dark powers that rule our thinking. So for Paul, the creation of a new humanity in the Messiah, were those ethnic social boundary lines that usually cause violence and hostility are completely disintegrated. To him, that's the multifaceted wisdom of God that the church can display, both to the powers on earth and to the powers in heaven. That's his worldview.

Jon: Oh, I see. Now I understand that sense more.

Tim: The church is the new humanity.

Jon: He wants all the power structure on earth and all the power structure in heaven. Then these the sons of God, they're like, "That's the spiritual nature behind the power structure on earth?"

Tim: Yeah, the stuff behind the curtain.

Jon: Stuff behind the curtain. All of that is going to look at what's happening with the church and its unified nature and be like, "Oh, okay, God is up to something."

Tim: "That's a way of being human that I have never imagined." I mean, it takes like a step of one inch.

Jon: That's awesome. It's very beautiful. Then you get a guy like my son's teacher who thinks of the church during that time and goes, "What was going on? I don't really get it. Why do people not like him?" Instead of "Whoa, how wise was God? That's a cool new way to be human."

Tim: In Paul's view, that's a cool new way to be human. I heard an analogy recently. For example, the slave and master dynamic in the Roman world. So we're talking like a massive proportion, nearly half of the Roman Empire consists of people who are the property of other people. And slavery was as essential to their economy as electricity is to modern Western developed countries. So just imagine.

Jon: Everything in our economy is connected to electricity.

Tim: That is the role that slave labor played. How do you build stuff? How does anything get done? Through your property. Through your slaves.

Jon: But Paul wasn't going around saying, "You can't have slaves."

Tim: No. What he was doing was going around creating communities where slaves and masters when they're in this space, the Jesus space, they are equals, and their relationship to one another is completely dissolved in terms of the power difference between them. So help me with an analogy that may be electricity is a good one. It's almost like creating Amish communities or something like that. But these would be like Amish communities that aren't separating. These are like communities that are planting and growing within your neighborhood. Electricity is not the good example.

Jon: Okay. So you're saying, trying to understand what it would be like for Paul to have come in?

Tim: Shock value that this kind of community would have had.

Jon: Because you're so used to an economy that relies on slave labor. And he comes in and says, "This whole thing's working because you're treating the slave they're less than you, that they can be owned like property and don't have as much dignity. But that's wrong. We all have the same dignity. And when we get together, there's no difference in our status. But when you go back to work, if you're the slave, do your

job. And if you're a master, put your slave to work but be good. But when we're coming to eat meals and stuff, you're not more special."

Tim: That's right. That's right. And he'll even go a step further like in the letters of Philemon and say, "Receive back Onesimus who was your slave, no longer as a slave, but as a brother." "Treat him like family," is what he tells the slave owner to do to his slave, who almost certainly has, like wronged him in some way, financially.

What he doesn't say is what many of us wish you would say, which is like, "Free him. Liberate him"

Jon: "No more slavery."

Tim: He's doing something more strategic. He's undermining the very basis of the power difference, the status difference between them. He's letting the good news about king Jesus do it not from his own authority, he's letting the story of Jesus play out its natural implications. If Jesus died for me, and Jesus died for my slave, then we're both on level ground before King Jesus. He's my family member now. I can't treat him the way that I treated him.

It has the air of a dangerous counterculture. Yeah. And for Paul, he—

Jon: Why are you messing things up?

Tim: So we keep coming back to this, but for Paul, there's a cosmic narrative that he thinks he's participating in. It's new creation. It's heaven on earth. It's the new humanity that's unified as God's image bearers to rule the world together in the love of God, which means that one human isn't not the property of another. But he doesn't say it in the way that I think we wish he would say it, and so, therefore, we don't think that that's what he's doing. But it is what he's doing in his cultural setting.

Maybe we just should land the plane on this plane. But for Paul, this was his deal. The gift that he brought to Jerusalem from these non-Jewish churches—

Jon: Was a representation of that.

Tim: Was a powerful symbol of this new human unity in the Messiah. It was so important to him that he put his life on the line to take this money to Jerusalem. And it landed him in a heap of trouble, but he did it anyway.

Jon: So you've got a Jewish man who grew up in a society in a culture that believed that they were God's representatives on earth, and he was very zealous about it, and he did all the right things. He has this radical conversion, and now he realizes that he's fighting against the culmination of this movement, Jesus and that what God wants to do and has been doing through Israel is now breaking out. And so, now that becomes his soul passion. "I want to see it break out and I want to see as it breaks out, it become unified." He's compulsive about it.

Tim: Yeah, totally. Methodical, compulsive. It's the same theme that comes to expression in Jesus' prayer in the Gospel of John. "That my disciples that they may be one,"

Jesus says, "as you father and I are one." The unity of the new humanity in Jesus actually shares in the unified community of love that is the Christian God.

Man, this is so powerful. There has never been a century in the last 2,000 years where this isn't controversial and relevant and category breaking.

Jon: What? The unity of the human race?

Tim: The unity of "let's just start with a church." The point is that the unity of Jesus' disciples, for Paul is the main symbol that Jesus is who he says he is. And when you take a look at church history, there have been very powerful expressions of that unity. And there have been the exact opposite as well.

Jon: So do you think of Paul like was zapped into the 21st century suddenly? This was on his mind and he's at the front lines doing that and then he's like in Portland, and he's walking around and he's seeing the different churches in different corners and stuff?

Tim: I don't know. Part of me thinks that he would just be like, "What have you done to this movement? "And another part of me thinks like, "Yeah, that's humans."

Jon: "I get it."

Tim: "It's hard. Unity is hard. You think you're right, I think I'm right, it's hard to humble yourself, and lower the importance of your differences and elevate the importance of our unity, and what we have in common with other followers of Jesus." But Unity has been probably one of the most difficult things for followers of Jesus to maintain.

I think, for me, personally, speaking personally, the unity of the movement of Jesus across theological, denominational, traditional lines, for me, sitting with this theme and Paul's writings for so many years and seeing how central it was to was thinking, it's having an effect on me. And it is. It's making me a lot more troubled at the divided nature of the Jesus movement. But who can carry such things?

Jon: Paul did.

Tim: Paul did. That's right. It kept him up. He tried to do everything he could to bring unity. This is speaking personally, even about The Bible Project, what we're doing, but that's the spirit we're trying to create tribute to in just focusing on the main themes of the biblical story and trying our hardest at least not to highlight the things that divide Jesus' followers because there's so much more. The most profound stuff is the stuff we have in common, which is why we never talked about it because it's not the exciting, controversial stuff. So I think we need to take this theme on board. This theme from Paul's life, and writings on board in a new way in our day.

Jon: It has been cool to see with this project, how it's been embraced throughout many different traditions. And not in a spirit of like, "Oh, I can tell that you guys are on our theological team necessarily. It's just like, "Man, we could tell that you guys care about this whole thing. That we're part of it and you're part of it."

Tim: That's right.

Jon: It's been really encouraging to see.

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Justin: Hi, this is Justin Mendoza. I'm from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas. I use The Bible Project in my church community that the Lord has placed me in by teaching them the Word of God and using what The Bible Project has to offer to make it easier for them to understand and really get the significance of what the story is in the Bible.

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