

- *There's a phrase that has emerged over the past decade or so... it refers to the anxiety people may feel of missing something, as a result of the seemingly instant information about everything available on social media. FEAR OF MISSING OUT... or better known by its acronym... FOMO*
- *If we could take this idea back about 1961 years... give or take a few months... and go to the small rented house in Rome occupied by the apostle Paul and his Roman guard, we would see Paul speaking to a group of men who decidedly lacked a fear of missing out they SHOULD have had... I'm going to call this...*

✠ **FOMO and FOMOOWGID**

- *Fear of missing out on what God is doing!*
- *This is one of the great themes- or metanarratives- of Luke's entire history of the birth and growth of the Christianity's first generation.*
- *God was at work, doing something very NEW in the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God continued this work through the first generation of believers, and ultimately through Christ's revelation to Paul of the full teaching of Truth and Grace.*
- *Paul is God's chief witness to this full message of Grace, and yet while it is NEW- it is the NEW COVENANT- it flows from and is rooted in God's promises to the Nation of Israel found the Law and Prophets of what we call the Old Testament.*
- *In other words, the evidence of what God was doing was everywhere. To the people of Israel, this was evidence that could be SEEN, HEARD, UNDERSTOOD and RECEIVED... and many people of Israel did understand and receive the message. Remember, for the first few years the church- or The Way as they described themselves- was an almost exclusively a Jewish phenomenon.*
- *BUT, as a nation, particularly among the highest levels of Israel's religious leadership, the message was not understood. To these people who viewed themselves as the keepers and protectors of God's presence in the world, when the long promise of the messiah and the hope of resurrection was finally revealed in Christ, they missed it. The evidence of God's work was all around them, and yet they missed out on what God was doing.*
- *And so as Luke draws his history to a close, he focuses on Paul's words to the Jewish leaders in Rome- YOU ARE MISSING IT... but you don't have to.*
- *SO, let's get to the story... Paul has taken a few days to settle in to this new home, and his first official action is to invite into his home these leaders of the Jewish community in Rome.*
- *INTERESTING- Paul knew there were Christ followers- a community of faith- in Rome. He had written to them earlier (Romans). And yet, his first impulse is not to gather with these believers, but to speak to his Jewish brothers and sisters. He wants them to know that the message he is bringing is FOR THEM. The good news of Jesus Christ is in fact rooted in the HOPE....*

† **The Hope of Israel** Acts 28:17-22 *Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: “My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. ¹⁸ They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. ¹⁹ The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. ²⁰ For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.”*

- **Lets think of this from the perspective of these Jewish leaders. You’ve been invited to go to the house of this man named Paul- You don’t really know anything about him, except that he is Jewish, a religious leader associated with “The Way”, and he is under Roman guard. WHO IS THIS GUY?**
- **So Paul, not knowing if accusations against him had already arrived, he begins by saying why he was there. After all, while he wasn’t in a formal prison, he isn’t free to leave- he is chained, and right there is Roman guard.**
- **Paul recaps his defense as he has done multiple times before, and he gets straight to the point- It is because of the HOPE OF ISRAEL that I am bound with this chain.**
- **By ‘Hope of Israel’ Paul is referring to Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah- but even more, Paul is referring to the Resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus, and the resurrection we share with Christ. Throughout all his trials in Caesarea, Paul emphasized multiple times- it is because of the RESURRECTION that I am here.**
- **SO, Paul’s point to these Jewish leaders is the message of Jesus Christ is not some theory made up from whole cloth- Rather, the gospel is the fulfillment of their own scripture. In other words... what you have always been waiting for God to do, this is what He is now doing!**

²¹ *They replied, “We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. ²² But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.”*

- **Interesting note here. Some scholars have questioned this, asking how it could be possible the accusations about Paul could not have reached the Jewish community in Rome. After all, it’s been at least over 2.5 years since Paul was first accused by the Jerusalem Sanhedrin.**
- **There are several answers to this objection, and one is that rather than hurting Luke’s credibility as a historian, this actually strengthens it.**
- **Luke is going to pains to demonstrate the general rejection of the Gospel by the Jews- especially the Jewish leadership, and it would have helped his case to have the accusations against Paul be flying in Rome as well. That the Roman Jewish community had not heard of Paul actually strengthens Luke’s account from a historical perspective.**
- **THAT SAID, these Jewish leaders HAD heard about the church, that it was viewed as a ‘sect’ an offshoot of Judaism, and that it was almost unanimously culturally opposed.**
- **They basically said to Paul “We don’t know who you are, but we’ve definitely heard about these Jesus followers. We would like to learn more about this, because everything we’ve heard says this movement is dangerous.”**

- **THIS BEGS THE QUESTION-** why would there be almost universal opposition to the Christian movement in Rome, especially since the accusations against Paul and against his teaching had not yet made it to Rome?
- **Think of it.** The church in Rome had zero political power or influence. It was small and mostly located among the lower economic classes. Multiple historians have demonstrated that in Roman society both Jews and Christians were outsiders, but to be a Christian was to be ultimate 'less than'. **WHY?** Lots of theories on this, but here's one:
- **Roman culture was very religious, but at the core of their religious system-** and the chief attributes of their gods- is that they were man centered. They catered to the inherent selfishness, pridefulness, and moral free-for-all endemic to the human condition. This is what Paul describes in Romans chapter 1- Their system of religion allowed- even exalted- the devaluation of other human beings, with no guiding foundation of moral truth.
- **In contrast, the Gospel spoke of the WORD MADE FLESH-** that THE GOD came to humanity, bore upon himself the wrath and brokenness of sinful humanity, to forgive, redeem, set free, and bring hope and new life for ALL PEOPLE. The Gospel proclaimed the inherent value of all people, that God treated all people equally. The Gospel proclaimed a hope, peace, and contentment not constrained to the fragility of circumstance and the approval or condemnation of other people. The Gospel proclaimed the highest form of love and worship of God was how you sacrificially loved and cared for other human beings. The Gospel proclaimed there was no level of human shame and brokenness from which God would not forgive, restore, and love. The Gospel proclaimed there were no longer any men- or man based systems of authority- that could stand between any person and a redemptive, life-giving relationship with God.
- **In Jesus Christ people saw how God didn't demand to be worshipped for His own sake-** as the Roman emperors did- but came to us, lived among us, loved us, and suffered and endured the cross for our sake.
- **But most importantly, the Gospel didn't just proclaim these things, it actually accomplished them.** Just as was the case in Ephesus when multitudes of new believers were burning their personal idols, the threat of THE WAY was that lives were actually being changed.
- **In almost every way, the teaching, beliefs and actions of the Christ followers were profoundly counter-cultural...** and for this they were mocked, resisted, denied an equal place in society, and within just a few years would be blamed for Rome's problems and persecuted, with many of them facing death.
- **AND SO HERE we had Paul, a Jew of the highest order, also associated with and proclaiming the 'Good news' of this strange group of people...** These Jewish leaders wanted to know more.
- **As the story continues, they return to Paul's home in even greater numbers, where he now moves his focus to the Kingdom of God.**

✠ **The Kingdom of God** Acts 28:23 *They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus.*

- *We've talked many times here how the Hebrew Bible is like a giant flashing arrow pointing towards Jesus. This is what Paul does- he uses their own scriptures to demonstrate what God was doing through Jesus Christ.*
- *Central to what God had accomplished through Jesus was the idea of God's Kingdom. Basically, the fullness of God's will, his purpose, and his nature was fulfilled and made manifest in Jesus Christ.*
- *In his book "The Divine Conspiracy" Dallas Willard describes God's Kingdom as "The range of God's effective will- where what He wants done is done."*
- *Likewise, God's Kingdom didn't come into existence through Jesus' ministry- it has always existed and always will. Rather, in Jesus Christ God's Kingdom has broken into the affairs of humanity in a new way, and through Jesus Christ humanity may enter into and experience the good of God's Kingdom.*
- *To these Jewish leaders, Paul proclaims that at the center of God's Kingdom stands Jesus Christ, in his death and resurrection- and this is the hope their own scriptures had revealed.*
- *In other words- The evidence of what God is doing has always been with you, and right now it is all around you... but you are MISSING IT.*

✠ **Missing it** **Acts 28:24-27** *Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. ²⁵ They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet: ²⁶ "Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." ²⁷ For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'*

- *This is from Isaiah 6:9-10. We see this quoted five other times in the NT, four by Jesus, speaking to his own people who were rejecting him just as Paul's own people were rejecting him.*
- *These Jewish leaders would have known this passage- Isaiah spoke it 800 years earlier as the Nation of Israel turned against God in disobedience.*
- *Paul's message was clear- just as your fathers missed what God was doing, so you have missed it now.*
- *The imagery here is stark. The scripture says there is*
 - *Something that can be clearly seen*
 - *Something that can be clearly heard*
- *And yet, their eyes didn't perceive and what they heard they didn't understand. WHY?*
- *Because their hearts had become calloused. A callous is a thick protective layer our skin forms to protect us from a repetitious activity.*
- *In Isaiah's time part of Israel's rebellion was trying to establish their own security apart from trusting God, and they sought help from rulers and sources who did not worship God. They basically said "God, we will figure this out on our own, we don't need you."*

- *In the first century we see Israel's leadership- representing the Nation- become entrenched in their own ways of thinking- entrenched in protecting themselves, their traditions, their power, and their right to hate the gentiles- it was all about them, to the point that when their greatest hope stood before them, they didn't see it.*
- *And now Paul tells these leaders of the Jewish community in Rome... this is happening to you as well. You're MISSING it... but you DON'T HAVE TO.*
- *Paul continues with a pattern we see multiple times in scripture- God gives a warning, but it is a warning...*

✠ **A warning with an invitation** **Acts 28:28** *“Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!”*

- *The message here is clear. Just because you don't believe this is what God is doing, doesn't mean God will stop doing it.*
- *God had brought to fullness the hope of Israel- the hope of Salvation through the resurrection of Jesus Christ... and to this group of men Paul proclaims-*
- *You may have rejected this hope, but know this- The hope of the Messiah- This New Hope of New Life with God through Jesus Christ- it will go to those who will listen. It will go to the gentiles. It will go to the very ends of the earth.*
- *This had to be a stunning thing for these men to hear- and for some, infuriating. But there's something Paul didn't say. He didn't say the hope of Christ was no longer available to the Jews. It was, and it is, just as it is to ALL PEOPLE.*
- *Luke ends with an image of Paul continuing to preach this message to all who would listen, likely both Jews and Gentiles- and at the center of his message was the person and work of Jesus Christ.*
- *It's now been thirty years since the birth of the church, and just as was the case on that day of Pentecost back in Jerusalem, the message of the Gospel was all about Jesus.*

✠ **It's all about Jesus** **Acts 28:30-31** *For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. ³¹ He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!*

- **AND WITH THAT, my friends, we have reached the conclusion of the book of Acts.**
- *Lets go back to this idea of the centrality of Jesus. It may sound obvious, but it hasn't always been the case, and it's not always the case now.*
- **There IS NO Christianity apart from Christ. There is no experience of the Christian life apart from faith in Christ, and the Life of Christ, lived in and through us. Likewise, there is NO TRUE EXPRESSION of the Christian life that is not a result of, and consistent with, the nature and Character of Christ.**
- *We are imperfect, yes. Our journey with Christ- a good NT description would be our walk of union with Christ- is sometimes two steps forward and one step back. But the goal, the aim, THE ESSENTIAL MATTER- is that the life of Christ is our source, and the character*

and nature of Christ increasingly becomes HOW WE LIVE. EVERYTHING Paul and the NT teaches points toward this.

- **Paul expresses this in Galatians, as he expresses dismay over how these early believers were turning to legalism and law based religion, rather than dependence upon Jesus.**
- **In an image only many women can relate to, Paul said...**

Galatians 4:19 *Dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,*

- **That is the essential matter. That Christ is formed in us. That in our mind, our emotions, and our wills, we increasingly take on the character and nature of Jesus.**
- **Because if this NOT the essential matter, we will miss the fullness of life Christ makes possible, and we very well may MISS OUT on what God is doing.**
- **Church- As Henry Blackaby famously said in his book “Experiencing God”, GOD IS AT WORK all around us, always, and everywhere.**
- **And by FAITH- as look to Christ and are filled with His Spirit, God invites us to SEE, HEAR, and UNDERSTAND what He is doing- because everything that God is doing, He is working to do it THROUGH US.**

† Seeing, hearing, and understanding

- **In Mark chapter 8 there is a penetrating scene with Jesus and his disciples. Jesus’ miracle of feeding the 5000 had just recently happened, and as they were crossing the sea of Galilee, it turns out the disciples had forgotten to bring any bread for themselves.**
- **Jesus sees a teaching opportunity, and using language reminiscent of Isaiah 6, he challenges his disciples with a question we to need to hear.**

Mark 8:14-21 *The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat.*

¹⁵ *“Be careful,” Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.”*

- **By this Jesus referred to the spiritual blindness and self-centeredness of the Pharisees and Herod. But the disciples missed the point....**

¹⁶ *They discussed this with one another and said, “It is because we have no bread.”*

¹⁷ *Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? ¹⁸Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? ¹⁹When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”*

“Twelve,” they replied. ²⁰“And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” They answered, “Seven.” ²¹He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”

- **What was Jesus’ point? What were they missing?**
- **They didn’t yet understand that God’s plans and purposes- that LIFE ITSELF- was not dependent upon them. CHRIST was their source. JESUS was their hope, their guide, and their provision.**
- **If they tried to make life work through their own wisdom, their own attempts and righteousness, they would become like the Pharisees and Herod- self centered and blind to God’s presence.**

- ***BUT WHEN THEY TRUSTED HIM, FOLLOWED HIM, they would know life in ABUNDANCE.***
- ***MY FRIENDS... the community of people whose lives were transformed by the Good News of Jesus Christ- the church, THE WAY... In a mere 30 years this community grew from 100 frightened disciples on the morning of Pentecost, to a community of tens of thousands, spanning the entire Roman Empire, made up of every ethnicity known to the Roman world, and FROM ROME, growing out on roads leading to the very ends of the earth as was known at that time.***
- ***THIS HAPPENED not because of human ingenuity and strategic planning, nor political influence, cultural influence, or financial resources, nor powerful teachers and gifted worship leaders...***
- ***IT HAPPENED as people heard, saw, and came to understand the life transforming Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Grace of God. It happened because LIVES WERE CHANGED, including Paul's- and these changed lives trusted the leadership of God.***
- ***It happened... because a rag tag group men and women took Jesus at His word when he said to them.... "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."***
- ***May it be said of us***