

# World Upside Down

Acts: More than a Movement, Part 2

Acts 27:1-28:16

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Friends, our passage today is sort of a puzzling one. I didn't know what to make of it at first. I needed to have a lot of talks with Jordan and my new office-mate Dominick. The previous passage was pretty straightforward. Paul does what we expect him to do; he preaches the gospel. And that'll preach! But this passage is quite different. Where's the gospel? There's no preaching, no mention of Jesus, and no gospel presentation. In fact, there's not much dialogue at all. What is going on here?

In this passage we have a detailed account of a shipwreck, but it's not just relating the facts. This narrative is building a world for us. Stories have a way of expanding our sense of what is possible. That's why I've always loved science fiction. A good sci-fi story suspends our disbelief, portraying fantastic worlds and creatures and events with enough realism that they might just be possible. As if, perhaps at some time long ago, in some galaxy far, far away, these things could really have happened. I think our writer, Luke, is doing something similar in this passage. He's world-building. He's transporting us to fantastic and exotic places—a storm-tossed boat in the midst of a typhoon, and a remote island inhabited by barbarians—because when we enter this world we expand our sense of what is possible.

Luke invites us to put ourselves into this story, into the story of Acts. It's a true story. It's the story of the kingdom of God breaking into the world, an unstoppable movement that won't end until it reaches the ends of the earth. And if we're going to be part of this movement—if we're going to move with it and not against it—then we not only need to know the message of the movement, we also need to know its destination, its outcome. The gospel is reality-altering. Nothing that it touches remains unchanged. Where the gospel takes root, a new reality begins to emerge. So it's not a false accusation in Acts 17:6 when the disciples are called people “who have turned the world upside down.” We disciples are agents of an alternative universe, a world that looks a lot like the one we're used to, except some of the rules are changed, as if gravity has been flipped. We're citizens of a world turned upside down.

Luke is giving us hints of that upside-down world in today's passage. It's a world that's fantastic and strange and yet, if we're willing to suspend our disbelief for a moment, we can see that it just might be possible.

Here's the key lesson that I think God wants us to understand from this passage: Being part of the movement of the gospel means embracing a new reality. If the gospel is reality-altering, then we need to step into that new reality.

We'll divide our passage into two parts, so we'll see two new realities that we need to embrace. This is a long passage, so we'll read it in several chunks, but please follow along starting in Acts 27.

## **THE HOPELESS RECEIVE SALVATION. (27:1-44)**

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The first new reality is that the hopeless receive salvation. In the world of the gospel, hopelessness is turned on its head, and salvation is found where it's least expected. This theme is present

throughout our passage, but we can see it primarily in chapter 27, where we find Paul at sea, headed for Rome along with his friends, his Roman captors, and his fellow prisoners.

Our passage starts out by relaying all the places they stop along their journey. This isn't a straight shot to Rome. They stop at a bunch of ports along the way, each one with a name harder to pronounce than the last. And there are already some signs that this sea journey isn't going to be so easy. Within the first eight verses, Luke reports that "the winds were against us...we sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty...the wind did not allow us to go farther." They had to stick close to the shelter of different islands and they coasted along "with difficulty."

It's slow going, so slow that they soon have a problem on their hands. Winter is coming, and that means treacherous conditions on the Mediterranean. Being both a wise man and an experienced sailor, Paul knows this, so he tries to warn the crew. That's where we pick up in verse 9.

### **Acts 27:9-20<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>9</sup>Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, <sup>10</sup>saying, "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." <sup>11</sup>But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. <sup>12</sup>And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

<sup>13</sup>Now when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. <sup>14</sup>But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. <sup>15</sup>And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. <sup>16</sup>Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat. <sup>17</sup>After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergird the ship. Then, fearing that they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the gear, and thus they were driven along. <sup>18</sup>Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. <sup>19</sup>And on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. <sup>20</sup>When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

Paul and his fellow travelers are caught in the kind of storm sailors have nightmares about. This is essentially a hurricane, and it's flinging their ship around the Mediterranean like a rubber ducky in a kiddie pool. Things are looking bleak. The crew is running out of options. After two days in the storm they surrender their cargo to the sea. All hope of profiting from this voyage is abandoned. After three days they surrender their tackle as well. All hope of controlling the ship is abandoned—they're not really sailing anymore, just trying to stay afloat. And finally, after many days of darkness, they're ready to surrender their lives as well. Verse 20 says "All hope of our being saved was at last abandoned." After all, who *could* save them? Who *would* save them? You'll want to remember that word, "saved." Luke has more to say about it. When we pick up in verse 21, Paul can stay silent no longer.

### **Acts 27:21-26**

<sup>21</sup>Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. <sup>22</sup>Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. <sup>23</sup>For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, <sup>24</sup>and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

*Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.<sup>25</sup> So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.<sup>26</sup> But we must run aground on some island."*

Paul received a message from God, and he needs to share it with the crew. But first he says, "Men, you should have listened to me." What we learn here is that if you want someone to listen to you the next time, it's always best to start with "I told you so." No, actually this is just showing that Paul's word came true. They didn't listen to him, and bad things happened. Paul is like a prophet in this passage, who receives messages from God that then come to pass. The welfare of his listeners depends on whether they heed his word.

Paul is also strikingly calm in the midst of chaos and hopelessness. He's reminiscent of Jesus in Luke 8, who's calm enough to remain asleep in the boat in the midst of a storm, while his disciples say "Master, Master, we are perishing!" Jesus calms the storm and his disciples marvel, saying, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?" Paul himself doesn't command the wind and the waves, but he has faith in the God who does. This hurricane is not outside God's control, which means he can bring salvation even though the situation seems hopeless. God directly promised Paul that he would stand before Caesar, so he knows that he's going to make it out of this storm alive.

But what about the others on board the ship? They too will be saved, because "God has granted [Paul] all those who sail with [him]." Perhaps Paul was even praying for their lives, and God granted his request. In any case, they're going to be saved because of Paul's presence among them. But it's not going to be a smooth ride. We're going to be saved, he says, but "we must run aground on some island." That's what happens in the rest of this chapter, starting in verse 27.

#### **Acts 27:27-44**

*<sup>27</sup>When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land.<sup>28</sup> So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms.<sup>29</sup> And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come.<sup>30</sup> And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow,<sup>31</sup> Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." (There's that word again.)<sup>32</sup> Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go.*

*<sup>33</sup>As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing.<sup>34</sup> Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you."<sup>35</sup> And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat.<sup>36</sup> Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves.<sup>37</sup> (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.)<sup>38</sup> And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.*

*<sup>39</sup>Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore.<sup>40</sup> So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach.<sup>41</sup> But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf.<sup>42</sup> The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape.<sup>43</sup> But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land,<sup>44</sup> and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.*

In these final scenes we see a dramatic turn of events. At first it seems that Paul's speech has had no effect. The crew hasn't taken heart. They're still acting out of fear. Some of the crew try to ditch the rest of them and sneak onto a lifeboat. They don't believe Paul's word that they'll be saved by running aground. But the centurion does believe. Paul's "I told you so" moment seems to have stuck with him, so when Paul warns that their salvation depends upon everyone staying on the ship, the centurion has his men cut away the lifeboat. As we often see in Scripture, salvation depends upon heeding the words of the prophet who speaks for God. This is the first instance where we see the rest of the crew trusting Paul, and it bodes well for them.

But the next scene brings an even greater reversal: the prisoner becomes the host, who provides both the encouragement and the nourishment they need to survive. We'll talk more about this in the next section, but just take note of a couple things right now. First, our key word comes up again in this scene. In verse 34, Paul says the food "will give you strength." The ESV footnote is helpful here, because that word translated "strength" can also mean "deliverance" or "salvation." Somehow the salvation Paul has been talking about depends upon this meal.

Notice also that everyone is present at this meal. Paul urges them "all" to take food. He says, "not a hair is to perish from the head of *any of you*." He gives thanks in the presence of "all," and they're "all" encouraged, and they were "in all 276 persons." Not one person is missing, and not one will perish. They're all in the same boat now.

From this point forward, it seems that everyone believes Paul's word. They abandon the rest of the wheat cargo to try to float as high as possible, a sign that they're trying to survive by running the ship aground, as Paul had instructed. And in the very next verse, they see their destination. They toss off the remaining anchors and pick up speed with whatever sails they have left, but they run aground on a reef before reaching the shore. The soldiers want to kill Paul and the other prisoners so they don't escape as everyone swims to shore. But in yet another reversal, Paul, the savior of the ship, is saved by the centurion. "And so it was that *all* were brought safely to land." That's our word again. A clunkier translation would be "all were saved onto the land."

Without a doubt, this passage is about salvation. The word occurs two more times in the next section, bringing our total to eight. That's almost a third of all the occurrences of the root "to save" in the book of Acts. But what kind of salvation do we have here? It's striking that we don't see Paul preaching the gospel here. That doesn't mean he didn't, but either way, it's not what Luke chose to emphasize in this passage. If nobody believed in Jesus in this passage—if nobody "got saved" so to speak—then what's the point of all this?

### *Lessons Learned*

Well, I think there are two lessons we can take away. **The first is that doing good to others is a good in itself.** In other words, acts of kindness and mercy don't lose their value if we fail to proclaim the gospel. Now before you start thinking I've gone off the rails, remember last week's sermon. You know how I feel—and how Paul feels—about bearing witness for Christ. It's something we must do. We're all called to do it.

But in this passage Paul doesn't speak about Christ. He works for the good of those around him, even though he's their prisoner, and even though his own safety has already been assured. He provides the encouragement and the food they need in order to survive. In the next scene we'll see him healing people of their diseases, with no apparent profession of faith. And our inspired author

portrays all this in a positive light. The temporal, bodily salvation that God provides—often *through us*—is not meaningless in the absence of eternal salvation. It is good to do good to others, and not merely for the sake of evangelizing.

Let me be clear: the greatest good we can give to others is eternal salvation in the presence of God, and it comes through faith alone in Christ alone. That is our gospel, and there is no substitute. No “social gospel” can replace it. If we never speak about Christ, then we’re abandoning our mission. But we often hear things like, “Giving people food without giving them the gospel is just sending them to hell with a full stomach.” I don’t think God sees it that way. We shouldn’t mistake a lesser good for an evil. Giving food to the hungry isn’t sending them to hell, it’s loving our neighbor. The good that we do through our work and in our community has value in itself. But we can give our neighbor something even more valuable and love them even more by telling them about the eternal salvation that’s found in Christ.

Which brings us to the second lesson, what I think is the main point of our shipwreck narrative: **God is going to bring salvation to all peoples** (all people-groups). That might seem like kind of a random point, but hear me out. I think to understand what Luke is doing in this passage, we need to zoom out for a minute. One of the best ways to understand the logic of an individual passage is to see how it contributes to the message of the entire book. And this plan to bring the gospel to all nations is something that runs through all of Acts. When the risen Jesus appears to his disciples in the first chapter of Acts, he tells them in verse 8, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” There’s progression there from people geographically and culturally “nearer” to those farther away, and that bears itself out in the rest of the book. Now we come to the last two chapters of the book. And if you’ve ever read a book, then you know that the ending reinforces the message of the book as a whole. If there’s a lesson in this story, then it should become clear at the end. I don’t want to steal Jordan’s thunder for next week, but we’ve got to look at one verse. Take a look at Acts 28:28. “Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” There’s our word again. The salvation of God is going forth to the ends of the earth. That’s what’s foreshadowed by this shipwreck narrative.

I’m not saying that this account is merely a metaphor or an allegory. This event really happened. Yet Luke is using it symbolically to make a larger point. Good writers do this sort of thing all the time. In many novels, something happens in the story, but we don’t realize until the end that it was symbolic in some way. The shipwreck isn’t allegorical, so we don’t need to read into every detail. “What does it represent when they throw the cargo overboard? God’s gonna get us to our destination, but we’re going to have to surrender some things on the way, and it’s going to be stormy seas, and some people will know how to swim but others will have to get there floating on a piece of the ship.” Umm, no. We don’t need to read too much into things. But what happens in this passage, in broad strokes? We see a situation in which Gentiles, *all of them*, receive salvation from a hopeless situation by believing the word of God’s prophetic messenger. We see this storyline in Acts as well, from the beginning to the very end. God is sending people with the message of the gospel to the ends of the earth—to the whole Gentile world—and by believing that message, people from every tribe and tongue and nation will receive salvation.

There’s no mention of the gospel in this passage, but it’s all about the gospel. It’s an image of God’s plan that’s about to be fulfilled. Nothing can stop it, just as nothing can stop Paul from getting to Rome. Not even a hurricane. Because God will not fail to make his plan a reality.

God is bringing about a new reality that we need to embrace: the hopeless receive salvation. Those who haven't heard the gospel will hear. Those who were outside of the covenant people of God are now included. For any of us who have received salvation and are not Jews, that includes us!

Ephesians 2:11-13 tells our story: "Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh... were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

In the world turned upside down by the gospel, people who were once without hope and without God receive God's salvation in Christ. But that entails another surprising change: If salvation is going forth to all peoples, then that means these people are also joining the family. Those who were far off are brought near, perhaps nearer than we ever imagined or desired.

### **STRANGERS ARE RECEIVED AS FRIENDS. (28:1-16)**

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That's the second new reality of this movement of God: Strangers are received as friends. We see this most clearly starting in chapter 28.

#### **Acts 28:1-16**

<sup>1</sup>After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. <sup>2</sup>The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. <sup>3</sup>When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. <sup>4</sup>When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." <sup>5</sup>He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. <sup>6</sup>They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

<sup>7</sup>Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. <sup>8</sup>It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him healed him. <sup>9</sup>And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. <sup>10</sup>They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed.

<sup>11</sup>After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. <sup>12</sup>Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. <sup>13</sup>And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. <sup>14</sup>There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. <sup>15</sup>And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. <sup>16</sup>And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier that guarded him.

In this section, just like the last, there's no mention of eternal salvation. There's salvation from the sea, salvation from a snake, salvation from sickness, but nothing about salvation from our sins. Even when Paul is mistaken for a god, there's no mention of him proclaiming the gospel. Now, that doesn't mean he didn't. In Acts 14, when he was mistaken for a god in Lystra, he immediately, urgently pointed people to the true God. So I highly doubt Paul just let this opportunity slide by. But once again, this passage isn't meant to explicitly state the gospel, it's to foreshadow a world

turned upside down by the gospel. In these scenes on Malta we're given a preview of a new reality, where strangers are received as friends.

The strangeness starts out in verse 2, where we meet the “native people.” That’s really a kinder translation than it’s meant to be; the Greek word means “foreigners” or “barbarians.” Barbarians, to the Romans, were those who didn’t live according to Greco-Roman culture, didn’t speak Greek, and were generally regarded as unsophisticated. In other words, people who are “different than us.” And shipwrecking on an unknown island and finding yourself at the mercy of barbarians was not a good situation. Ancient readers familiar with the Odyssey and other shipwreck stories would have expected Paul and the crew to be received with hostility.<sup>2</sup> But instead they’re shown hospitality. “The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold.”

Welcoming and caring for strangers—especially strangers who couldn’t repay you—was one of the highest Greek virtues.<sup>3</sup> Luke describes the Maltese islanders with a word that evokes all sorts of negative stereotypes, only to turn them upside down. A hospitable barbarian is an oxymoron! It’s totally unexpected. And the surprise doesn’t stop there. In the next scene, the leading man of the island receives them and shows them hospitality for three days. Paul heals the man’s father and all the other sick people on the island, and when the crew departs, the Maltese supply whatever they need. There’s an exchange of care for one another. Somehow two groups of strangers/foreigners have become friends.

The stereotypes about barbarians aren’t the only ones that Luke challenges in this passage though. We also see a centurion display unexpected hospitality. Roman soldiers were known for being violent and cruel—they were the oppressors of the Jewish people. But look all the way back to 27:3. “Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for.” Kindness shown to a prisoner, one who has little to offer in return. And it’s this centurion who later spares Paul’s life as they’re evacuating the ship.

Notice also that the entire passage is framed by Christian friendship. In the verse we just read, Paul is allowed to receive care from his friends, probably Luke and Aristarchus. Then all the way down in chapter 28:14-15, when Paul arrives in Italy, he receives hospitality from the brothers in one city, and then the brothers in Rome go out of their way to receive him. Then he thanks God and he’s encouraged. We’ve got a passage framed by Christian friendship and filled with unlikely friends.

And in the middle of the whole narrative, 27:33-37, at the turning point when the crew goes from distrusting Paul to believing his word, we have perhaps the most unlikely instance of hospitality. Paul, the prisoner, is turned into the host who invites strangers to the table, who thanks God in the presence of all, encourages all, and provides the bread for all that he says is “for their salvation.”

This kindness, this hospitality, this encouragement...it’s the stuff of friendship, of brotherhood. In the upside-down world created by the gospel, friendship is found in the most unlikely of places and people. In foreign lands, among former enemies and oppressors and strangers. In situations seemingly without hope and without God. There we find not only salvation but friendship. All are brought near by the blood of Christ.

### ***Lessons Learned***

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<sup>2</sup> Joshua W. Jipp, *Reading Acts*, p. 127

<sup>3</sup> Joshua W. Jipp, *Saved by Faith and Hospitality*, p. 105

That's another lesson for us in this passage: **God is going to bring all peoples into his family.** God is not only bringing *salvation* to every culture, and nation, and class, he's also bringing them all into the family of God. If we read further in Ephesians 2, it says in verse 19, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." Those who were strangers are now part of the family.

That's good news for us Gentiles who don't have Jewish heritage. It's really good news for those of us whose ancestors weren't civilized Romans either. All you proud Germans here at First Free (myself included)—I hate to break it to you, your ancestors were considered barbarians. All you proud Scandinavians (you know who you are)—*definitely barbarians*. We're people that an ethnic Jew and civilized Greek like Paul would never have expected or wanted at the dinner table. But now we're part of the family.

I think you see the implication though. Who would you be uncomfortable having at the dinner table? Who's your equivalent of an uncivilized foreigner? Who's your equivalent of a centurion or a prisoner? They're joining the family too. Which means we need a change of perspective.

So here's our final lesson: **Every "stranger" is a potential friend.** What that means is that religious, ethnic, and social "others" are not by definition our enemies. Muslims are not our enemies. Immigrants are not our enemies. People on the south side of town are not our enemies. And they have the potential to be our friends. If we have a gospel-shaped perception of reality, we see every person as a potential member of God's family. But it's easier to say that than to actually live like it's true. Stereotypes are powerful, and we like safety and sameness. We like our world the way it is; we'd rather not have it turned upside down.

We Christians are all about foreign missions. We want to bring the gospel to the world. But often we don't want the world to come to us. We want to be bringers of salvation but not friendship. We don't want our backyard—or our church—filled with people who feel like strangers. But that sort of thinking comes from the world, from a perspective not transformed by the new reality of the gospel. Some people want to send others of different ethnic groups back somewhere. Some people tolerate others who are different but would never invite them to their dinner table. Well the book of Revelation says that heaven is going to be filled with people of every kind, and we're all going to sit at the same table. If you don't want people who are different at your table right now, then you might not like it there.

But the gospel offers a new perspective. The gospel can overcome the prejudice against "others" that we all have, because God turned us from strangers into members of his household. And now he's sending us to welcome others into the house as well.

One of the best ways to do that is by actually extending hospitality to all sorts of people, maybe just welcoming people into your house. Our staff team recently read a book about this very thing. It's short and accessible, and it would be great to read as a community group or on your own. It's called *The Simplest Way to Change the World: Biblical Hospitality as a Way of Life*, by Dustin Willis and Brandon Clements. I know when some of you hear that title, you're probably thinking, "The simplest way to change the world is telling people about Jesus." And I agree. But one of the best ways to get the chance to speak about Jesus is to be like Jesus, who had a strange habit of eating with people he wasn't supposed to.

Something amazing can happen in the simple act of inviting others into our homes and lives—especially when those others are not like us. Our lives can actually serve the same purpose as this strange story in Acts that we read today. We can give others a taste of a new reality where the hopeless receive salvation and strangers are received as friends. It's an announcement that God's kingdom has come, that the world is being turned upside down. It's a little slice of heaven.

I want to leave you with a picture of where we're headed. Let your destination determine the way that you walk today. Revelation 7:9-10: "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" This is our destination. This is what it will look like when the kingdom of God is the only one left. This is the world as we know it turned completely upside down. Strangers are all received as friends, and the hopeless all receive salvation. God is going to get us to that destination. But he's giving a taste of this future reality, a glimpse of it, a preview, to anyone who would believe in the Lamb and believe that it might just be possible.