

THE BIG IDEA: Sometimes shaking off an offense is the best defense of the gospel.

The Take-Off

We're kicking off a brand new series this morning called "The Gospel According to Taylor Swift" and I need to do a little bit of work to get us into our passage, but you can go ahead and start finding Acts 28 while I introduce you to the why behind this series.

As is true of most artists, people either love Taylor Swift or hate her, but the numbers would indicate that more and more people love her even if they don't admit it: at 25 years old, she's already worth \$200-240 million.

Her bank account isn't the only thing growing.

Time recently wrote about how her influence has grown so much that even Apple changed it's policy because of her, and Apple doesn't change for anybody.

Let me be clear: we're not doing a series to hold Taylor Swift up as a role model, or to encourage you to buy her music or buy your kids tickets to her next show.

We're doing it because it's hard to live in today's culture and NOT know or have heard of Taylor Swift, and because she writes songs that speak to a generation.

And we're doing it to ask one simple question: what would happen if the church used the message of culture to communicate a greater message to culture?

The church has done a great job of talking to culture, but talking isn't communicating, because communicating requires that someone else is listening.

I was at a funeral once where the preacher talked forever, and no one moved. No one cried, laughed, or even resembled being alive.

Then he said the family wanted to play a song to honor their loved one, and an older guy hit play on a CD player and 3 notes into the twangiest country song ever written, there were sobs and heaving shoulders everywhere.

The preacher talked. The music communicated.

Taylor Swift is communicating. Her songs connect and people listen.

Sometimes people like me when my kids DJ in the car and her songs come on.

I dance, I lip sync, but I listen to the lyrics to see if there is anything that I can use in them to help point a culture towards the gospel.

Jesus talked with people in his day like Swift sings to people today. He used common things that people could relate to. But as you'll see, The Gospel According to Taylor Swift only goes so far.

But there's a greater gospel that picks up where Swift's gospel stops, and that's what this series is all about.

Jesus took things that people could relate to and used them to point to an unexpected, amazing spiritual truth.

Church people would call that using a parable. I call it communicating.

Just imagine what could happen if we used the message OF culture to communicate a greater message TO culture.

Ok, you're in Acts 28, right? Let's check out an amazing story from Paul's final missionary journey.

1. A storm, a fire and a snake

- a. When a chapter begins with words like "once safely on shore," it makes me curious to see what happened.
- b. There had just been a storm, a shipwreck, and now Paul - along with all the other prisoners and guards - has found his way to the shores of an island called Malta.
- c. The islanders are nice and build a bonfire. They probably had s'mores and singing, too, and right in the middle of the party, Paul got bitten by a snake. (v. 3)
- d. Not just any snake, but a snake with a great bite and one that the islanders assumed was deadly.
- e. And that's what brings us to our verse: "But Paul shook the snake off into the fire..."
- f. Paul was the first person in the Bible to shake it off.

2. How do you handle attacks?

- a. I'll give Taylor Swift some credit, when she wrote "Shake it Off" she wrote about something we all know
- b. Haters are gonna hate, hate, hate
- c. Jesus said something interesting to his disciples in Luke 17:1 - offense must come.
- d. In other words, Jesus tells us that opportunities to be offended are inevitable.
- e. All of us, at some point, are going to find ourselves on the wrong side of haters and fakers.
- f. We're going to find ourselves with an attack from our enemy, and the million-dollar question is, how will you handle those attacks?

- g. Paul said, “I’m just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake it off, shake it off”
- h. Look what happened when Paul shook the snake off into the fire.
- i. They thought he was a god. Ok, that’s not good, but as a result it opened the door for a huge healing service and amazing ministry over the next 3 months.
- j. All because Paul shook off the attack that everyone else thought would kill him.

3. The Gospel According to Jesus

- a. We know the Swift version of Shake it Off - it’s basically “no matter how hard you try to hurt me, I’m gonna shake it off by not caring about you and that way you can’t hurt me”
- b. But Jesus’ version? Very different.
- c. In fact, if anyone had the right to shake off the haters, it was Jesus, because we offended the glory of God in our sin and then we treated Jesus with contempt when he came to save us!
- d. How did Jesus respond to the attack? Instead of “shaking it off,” he decided to “take it on” and bear our sin on the cross.
- e. See, our enemy is like that snake, and he loves to bite us through the people around us
- f. He’ll do anything to create a wall between you and me, and he does it through preferences and offenses
- g. “I like this!” or “I like that!” means we’re against each other if you also don’t like what I like.
- h. But Jesus took on the nature of a servant (Philippians 2:7) and that allowed him to go to the cross for us.
- i. In fact, if Jesus had taken Taylor Swift’s advice to just shake off the haters, none of us would have any hope of salvation, because Romans 5:10 says we were his haters!
- j. Swift says shake off the attack and save face with the attacker.
- k. Jesus says shake off the attack and give grace to the attacker.

The Landing

The islanders sat around waiting for Paul to fall victim to the poison, and when he didn’t, they saw he was different. Maybe the greatest testimony to the world of the grace of God in our lives is our ability to shake off the attacks that are sure to come.

Think of it like this, and this is our Big Idea: sometimes shaking off an offense is the best defense of the gospel. (because it reveals that the gospel has changed us)

Just like Paul, by shaking the snake off in the fire and not allowing the poison to affect you, a door can be opened to share the message of Jesus.

After all, the world knows you’ve been attacked - shoot, the world may be the attacker.

They’re just watching to see what you do.

Shake it off, and watch the power of God take off.