

“ACTS 29, TO BE CONTINUED.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Texts for the Sermon: Acts 28:30-31

Prayer: Father, on the Mount of Transfiguration your voice was heard saying, “This is my Son whom I love, listen to Him.” Father, today by the power and help of your Holy Spirit enable us to listen to the Word of your Son and to truly hear Him for no one has ever spoken as He did. Give us ears to hear what your Spirit is saying to our church today. In Jesus name. Amen.

Introduction.

This morning we come to the end of the final chapter of Acts. Finally. For those who are curious about such things this is sermon number 87. What a journey we have had through this great book of the Bible, The Acts of the Apostles.

If you were going to sit down and write your life story, there is a real sense in which you could copy, cut and paste this entire book as chapter one of your story if you are a Christian. We can all trace our Christian heritage all the way back to Acts. This is the beginning of our spiritual genealogy.

God knows our spiritual lineage, our faith family tree all the way back to Paul’s preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. God knows the name of the Gentile who became a born-again believer and is your spiritual great grandfather and great grandmother.

The last word of the book of Acts is unhindered. Let’s see three things that are unhindered.

Vs. 28, unhindered salvation sent to the Gentiles.

Because of the Jews rejection of the Gospel it has come to us.

Acts 13:46-48 Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.” 48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord.

The Jews rejected Christ and the Gospel, and cast judgment on themselves as unworthy of eternal life. They rejected the greatest blessing ever offered. The Jews had been the chosen nation from among all the other nations. They had the place of preeminence and honor.

Paul gave the Jews the honor of having the right of first refusal. It was theirs for the taking.

Who throws away eternal life? Can you imagine throwing away eternal life? Can you imagine treating eternal life like something cheap, to be discarded? How hard must a heart be to throw away the most valuable thing ever offered on earth, the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Jesus didn't come to earth to fail, to shed His blood in vain. He came to save and He will. His light will shine, and His glory will be seen, in every nation. Now is the Gentiles time, now is the time for the Gospel to be spread to the end of the earth as a blessing to all the families of the earth.

When the Gentiles heard this they were overwhelmed with joy. May your salvation always be a source of joy for you, that you have been adopted and made an heir of so great a gift.

The door the Jews closed, became the door that opened to the Gentiles. Behind all of this is the purposeful work of God. And that door is still wide open, unhindered.

Vs. 30, unhindered hospitality for all who came for two years.

Paul gave himself completely to any and all who came. What hospitality. How many of us hesitate to show hospitality because our house isn't clean enough or we haven't finished that remodeling project. Paul was chained to a Roman guard, and we welcomed all comers. For two years he preached and proclaimed, explained and defended the Gospel.

His hands and feet were in chains, but his mouth and heart were not. As far as he was concerned, he was free. A prisoner and a preacher. He never once complained of his confinement, of his circumstances.

When life doesn't go the way you planned, the way you wanted or expected, then take what God gives, receive it humbly as a gift, and turn it and use it for His glory, and trust His wisdom.

What have we done with our limitations? Paul made the most of his.

The Roman soldiers who guarded Paul were on four-hour shifts, rotating in and out 24/7. This meant countless numbers of them would have heard Paul, and even been in much conversation with Paul. We have a remarkable statement to this effect in Paul's letter to the Philippians, which he wrote to them during this time.

Philippians 1:12-14 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the *whole imperial guard* and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. 14 And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Philippians 4:22 All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

He witnessed to the Roman guards, the Praetorian Guard, and filled Caesar's palace with saints.

Do you know what is remarkable about Paul's preaching of the Gospel in Rome of all places. He was able to do so freely without fear or threat of persecution. For the first time in his Christian life he preached boldly, freely, unhindered and all the while protected by Roman body guards. Those who hated him, and his message couldn't touch him. What grace.

It reminds me of that story from Corrie Ten Boom's life when she and her sister were imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp. Their barracks became invested with flies, and Corrie started to complain, until her sister pointed out that because of the flies the guards stayed away from their barracks, and they had much unhindered freedom. What grace.

Besides welcoming all who came and freely talking of the things of the Gospel, we know Paul wrote letters to the churches he planted, letters that changed the world. What were those prison epistles filled with? Themes of joy, peace, patience, contentment, hope.

"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

"Rejoice in the Lord, always, again I say rejoice."

"Be anxious about nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts ... and be thankful."

Next time you read Ephesians, Philippians or Colossians picture Paul writing in chains from Rome. How could he write like that? Because of his unhindered love and trust in a sovereign God.

Paul took his limitations and from his little prison room he made "a fulcrum which moved the world" (James Stalker).

Vs. 31, unhindered proclamation and teaching concerning Christ's kingdom.

Notice what has the focus of Paul's attention. He is living in Rome, the great capital of the vast Roman Empire, the seat of government, the residence of the great Caesars. This is Washington DC, London, Paris, the seat of all power, of all decisions, the center of the world.

What do you think was the topic of conversation on every street corner every day? Politics, wars, conquests, what was Caesar up to now, all things related to the kingdom of man, to the pressing issues of the empire.

Are we pulled into those kinds of conversations? Most definitely. In our daily conversations, how often do we talk about matters related to the kingdom of man? How easy is it to get pulled in to all the election news, even the news of an election in a state far from us?

The world has such a grip and grasp on us, this temporal, temporary, quickly passing world. There are a lot of people whose business it is to attend to the affairs of man and this world. Leave it to them, let us be engaged elsewhere. Let us make it our business to be engaged in things that are eternal, the business of the kingdom of God, in those things that make us wise, good, true, holy, faithful, fruitful, of all that belongs to the mystery of godliness.

Was Paul pulled into those discussions? No, he was too busy proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

I Corinthians 2:2 I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

What a refreshing way to live. Paul was in no way ashamed of the Gospel, and reveled in it. It was not just the good news, it was the best news, better news than any news on this earth.

The kingdom of God is the good news of God's breaking into our human history to establish His rule through Jesus Christ, the new king. Through the life, death, resurrection of Jesus the kingdom comes to all who repent and believe, who are forgiven by the blood of Jesus and are reconciled to God by the Spirit of adoption through faith in Jesus. That's worth talking about.

Without hindrance, unhindered.

The last word of the book of Acts is one word in Greek, it's a big, emphatic adverb that captures what the book of Acts is all about. Unhinderedly, without hinderance. It is a triumphant word, like a victor's shout.

What a victorious picture, what a triumph of God over Satan. Jesus is spreading the Gospel until the ends of the earth become his possession, until all the nations are his, until every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess.

The Gospel is going forth freely from the heart of the Roman Empire right under the nose of Nero, to the rest of the world, to Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas.

Despite every possible obstacle, the Gospel has progressed unhindered all the way to Rome. This is nothing less than a miracle of God's grace. The story that began in Jerusalem with 120 believers huddled in an upper room, now numbers tens of thousands scattered all around the Mediterranean. The Gospel concerning a humble Jesus of Nazareth is sweeping across the world and is now being preached in the capital of the Roman Empire, in the center of the world, by the man who at first violently and murderously opposed it.

Christianity has been carried from its cradle in Jerusalem to the imperial city of Rome. And one day Rome will fall, but Christianity will continue unhinderedly.

Think about how the Gospel got to Rome. Paul was attacked and beaten in Jerusalem, arrested to protect him from assassination. He was imprisoned for two years before being sent to Rome.

On the way all the forces of nature were aligned against him, a huge storm, nearly drowned, remember all hope was lost. Then the soldiers determined to kill him, and finally he was bit by a poisonous snake. Yet the Gospel arrives in Rome, unhindered.

Nothing proves the authenticity of the Gospel like the willingness of Paul to suffer and endure anything for it. He was willing to die for it for the sake of Gentiles (Eph. 3:1), for the sake of us.

Luke has reached the conclusion of his history, he has accomplished his task which was to show the objective has been reached.

Acts 1:8 You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Are any of you disappointed with how Luke ends the Book of Acts? I mean really, come on, help us out here and tell us what happened to Paul? Did he appear before Caesar, did he make his appeal, how did it go, was there a trial, what was the verdict? Inquiring minds want to know these kinds of details. There are a lot of rumors and speculations, tells us.

Why doesn't Luke tell us? We are instructed as much by what he doesn't tell us as we are by what he tells us. Here is the shocking news. All appearances to the contrary, the Book of Acts isn't about Paul. This book was never intended to be a personal biography of Paul. It's about Jesus and His Gospel spreading, it's about the kingdom of God being advanced.

Luke doesn't end focused on Paul's death, to do so would be trivial. The last scene is Paul in chains joyfully, triumphantly, boldly, unhinderedly proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ.

God has staked His claim in the heart of the Roman empire and from there the salvation of God has grown into the largest religion in the world, reaching all cultures and crossing all boundaries, spreading to the ends of the earth.

Acts 29, to be continued.

Thus ends the Acts of the Apostles and begins the Acts of the Followers of Jesus Christ. We have come, not to the end, but to the beginning of all that Jesus continues to do. It is with confident assurance we can be sure it will continue unhindered until it reaches the goal God intends. The salvation of the world cannot be stopped.

In recent years there have been some movements that have taken the name Acts 29. One of the most well know is a world-wide network of church planters. They understand Acts is not the end but the beginning of the rest of the story. The Gospel is still spreading, enduring defeats and enjoying triumph. It is a great story still being written and you and I have the immense privilege of being part of it.

Here we are in Acts 29. We are another church planted by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We are a continuation of the early church in Acts, a worshipping community, gathered together 2,000 years later, still devoted “to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42), unhinderedly preaching the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

We are still continuing to reach out and take the message of Jesus to our neighbors and to the ends of the earth.

We still pray the Lord's Prayer, “thy kingdom come, Lord Jesus.” Thy kingdom come and spread unhindered to the very ends of the earth until it penetrates the most unreached of the people groups (Frontier People Groups, Go31.org).

Luke's narrative ends abruptly, but triumphantly. God's purposes have not been stopped and cannot be stopped. Luke's narrative is finished, but God's is not. There is an invitation and an encouragement in that word unhinderedly, an invitation and encouragement to continue the story, to continue the mission, to share the Gospel, to be salt and light in this dark world, using your limitations to change your part of God's world.

May we always be by God's grace the twenty-ninth chapter of Acts. What part are you playing?