

# Without Hindrance

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Good morning. My name is Jeff Simpson. I am one of the pastors here and delighted to be here with you this morning. It's been a great two months working here at Advent. So I'm thankful for those of you who have gotten to know so far and look forward to continuing to get to know so many of you. I'm actually going to switch out this binder. Sorry. Here we go. All right.

Well, so this morning we come to the end of our study in the book of Acts, which we started back in April. And I think, you know, I've really enjoyed this series in the book of Acts. And if you're new to our church, something you should know is that one of the main things that we do is preach through books of the Bible. And that's because we have a really high view of scripture.

We believe that our main diet on Sunday mornings as we gather together in worship should be walking through books of the Bible. And so I've really enjoyed this series in the book of Acts. And I'm honored and excited to be able to close it out in Acts chapter 28. So as we do that, let me just recap where we've been. So last week, Tommy talked about Paul's trial before the Roman governor Festus. And Paul was in Caesarea and he was arrested. He was innocent. And because he didn't think he was going to get a fair trial, he actually appealed to Rome because he was a Roman citizen.

And so what that meant is that he actually had to travel to Rome to await trial. But before Festus sends him to Rome, he brings in King Agrippa to hear Paul's case and to hear what charges he should send along with him as he travels to Rome. And so we heard Paul's defense in his trial last week, that Paul's defense was not so much to clear his name and his reputation, but to communicate that the events of Jesus' death and resurrection are public truth for all people. And so that's where chapter 26 ends and it's where chapter 27 picks up. And chapter 27 is really about Paul's voyage from Caesarea across the Mediterranean to travel to Rome. And so he starts traveling on a boat with about 275 other people. They start sailing across the Mediterranean and on the way, they hit a huge storm.

And the huge storm causes their ship to start to break up. And they realize they have no other option that they're not going to be able to make it to Rome because this storm has caused their ship to run aground. And so they start throwing cargo off the ship. And eventually their ship runs aground in the island of Malta. And it's there that they have to stay for a while before they can find another ship, before they can start and continue the journey back to Rome. And so that's where we actually pick it up in chapter 28. And in many ways, this chapter is really a capstone to the book of Acts. We don't actually see a lot of new themes or new ideas here in Acts 28. What we actually see is a summary. What we actually see is the continuation of a lot of themes that we have seen all throughout the book of Acts. So I think it provides a kind of capstone to the mission of the early church in Acts and our mission as a church today. In this chapter, we see Paul both demonstrating the deeds of the kingdom of

[ 3 : 24 ] God and also proclaiming the words of the kingdom of God. And I think that there's a temptation in any church to emphasize one of those things at the expense of the other. There's a temptation to emphasize word ministry over at the expense of deed ministry. There's a tendency, there's a temptation to emphasize proclamation or demonstration, one or the other. And there are all sorts of reasons why individuals and churches might be tempted to do this. But what I want us to see this morning is that when it comes to the mission of the church, when it comes to our mission, that both of these things are inseparable.

Demonstration and proclamation. And this is true, not just because it sounds great on a church vision statement or website, but it's true because of the very nature of the kingdom. We believe that in Jesus Christ, the nature, that the kingdom of God has broken into this world in ways that are real and powerful and transformative. But we also believe that the kingdom is not fully here yet. As Christians, we await the final consummation of that kingdom and hope. And one of the ways that theologians across the ages have learned to describe that tension is that the kingdom is already, but not yet. It's already, but not yet.

It's here, but not fully. And this is why the words of the kingdom and the deeds of the kingdom are inseparable. Because the kingdom is here, we can demonstrate the reign of Jesus in our midst right now. And we also believe that the kingdom is not yet. And so we proclaim the words of the kingdom with hope that one day that kingdom will be finally fulfilled. And so that is what we see here in Acts 28. And that is what I want to draw our attention to this morning, that we see the kingdom of God demonstrated with power. And we see the king proclaimed with boldness. So first of all, we see the kingdom of God God demonstrated with power. So Luke tells us in verse two, that when Paul and all 276 crew members arrive on the Island of Malta, he says, 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. The people on the Island greet them with incredibly warm hospitality. And this word for kindness here is the word that we get our word for philanthropy from. Philanthropia. It means benevolence or love for humankind. But translators translate it unusual kindness. And before we go any further, I mean, wouldn't this be great if this was something that we were known for as a church? Those Church of the Advent people, I don't know necessarily if I agree what they believe, but they are unusually kind. They're unusually kind. I mean, what a thing to be known for, right? I mean, what a thing to strive for. As the story continues, something kind of strange happens. So they kindle this fire and Paul is grabbing sticks to put on this fire. And as he's laying the sticks on the fire, a snake jumps out and bites him on the hand.

And it must have been a poison to the snake because the people expect him to die. Verse four says, no doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.

But then as the story continues, verse five and six, we see that nothing happens. Nothing happens to him. And so the people change their mind. They say, well, this man, maybe he's not a murderer, but maybe he's a god because the snake bite has not caused him to die. And of course, he's, we know that Paul's not a god, but that's what they believe. That's their perspective. Then verses seven to 10 tell us that the chief of the island, a man named Publius, continues to show great hospitality to the crew.

[ 6 : 57 ] But, but during their stay, Publius's father falls ill. And so Paul goes to him and he prays for him and he puts his hands on him and heals him. And then Luke tells us that many other people in the island come to Paul and he heals them as well. And so this is one of the many examples in the book of Acts where we see the power of the kingdom of God demonstrated through acts of compassion and healing.

And as a church, this is one of the main things of this part of our mission, that we demonstrate the power of the kingdom through acts of love and compassion and kindness. I don't say, I want to say two things about this. The first is this, we believe that, that every ordinary act of love and mercy and kindness demonstrates the power of the kingdom. Every ordinary act of love demonstrates the power of the kingdom, whether it's feeding hungry people or, or teaching young children, changing diapers, serving Afghan refugees, or whether it's just the ordinary work that you do every day in your jobs and vocations, whether or not that feels meaningful or whether it feels boring. Whether you know it or not, your everyday work matters. The kingdom work, demonstrating the kingdom, isn't just the work of clergy or staff of a church. We believe in a priesthood of believers. Demonstrating the power of the kingdom is every believer's job. The logic of the kingdom is not only do your small, ordinary acts of love, not only do your, not only does your everyday work matter, but somehow by the power of the spirit, we believe that it will last into the new creation, which one day God will make. So we believe that every ordinary act of love demonstrates the power of the kingdom, but we also believe that sometimes God does extraordinary acts of healing, like what we see here in Acts 28, that also demonstrate the power of the kingdom. And these, these two things, we don't pit these against each other. We, we must not expect that the extraordinary acts of healing are somehow better or varsity compared to junior varsity, ordinary acts of, of love. Ordinary acts of, of love are, are not less important. And there's a very specific reason that, for this, because even the extraordinary acts of power in healing, like we see here in

Acts 28, are always meant to restore people back to their ordinary vocations as people made in God's image. The spectacle of the healing isn't the point. The point is the restoration of God's purposes for humanity. And that is what the kingdom of God is about. Our Anglican Catechism, question 179, says, what is the kingdom? What is the kingdom? And the answer that the catechism gives is the kingdom of God is the just and peaceful reign of Jesus over all the world, especially in the lives of his faithful people through the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. And Jeff Bailey, if you're listening, that was for you.

So the reign of Jesus, the kingdom says, the kingdom is about the reign of Jesus, and it is a reign that is just. And that's important because another thing that we notice here in this story, in Acts 28, is that the demonstration of the power of the kingdom always exposes faulty views of justice.

It always exposes faulty views of justice. What we see here is that even though these islanders on the island of Malta, even though they excel in the virtue of hospitality, they are deficient in their view of true justice. They have a fatalistic view. They basically believe in karma, this idea that you get what you deserve, that what goes around comes around. And we see this here right after Paul gets bit, and they say, this man must be a murderer. Justice has not allowed him to live. And they're probably imagining a personified view of justice, maybe in some ancient gods or goddesses, but it is a fatalistic view of reality. And there's a couple problems with this kind of fatalism or this view of karma. And the first is that a fatalistic view or a karmic view of justice can't account for unjust suffering. In a fatalistic mindset, if you're suffering, you deserved it. You probably deserve it from a past life or sins that you've committed in this life. But all of us know, right? All of us know that suffering, there's a lot of suffering in the world that is unjust. There's a lot of people, there's a lot of innocent people who suffer all the time. And so a fatalistic view of justice can't account for this unjust suffering. But the second thing that it can't account for is God's grace. It can't account for God's grace. And in one sense that they were right about Paul, that he was a murderer. In his past life, he was a murderer. He oversaw the execution of

[ 11 : 41 ] Christians. But they weren't right about Paul's God. They didn't know that Paul's God was both a God of justice and a God of grace. How can God be both? How can God be both a God of justice and a God of grace?

And the answer is that because Jesus and God in the flesh took on the justice that you and I deserved on the cross. It's through the cross of Jesus that we see the justice of God and the grace of God meet. Psalm 85 says that righteousness and mercy kiss one another. In Jesus Christ, we see the justice of God and the grace of God kiss one another. And the kingdom of God is present in Paul's life, not because he deserved it, but because he has experienced his grace. And the kingdom is present in your life if you have experienced the grace of God. I think one of the questions for us this morning is, do we pray like that is true? Like, do we pray like the kingdom of God is here in power? That God wants to demonstrate the kingdom through us. Do we pray as if the power of the kingdom is accessible to us by faith? Do we pray like that? Through prayer and through ordinary acts of love and compassion and sometimes extraordinary acts of healing, the power of God is present in the church to demonstrate that in Jesus Christ, the kingdom of God is breaking through even now, even through us. And the political economy of God's kingdom is not karma, but grace. So first, we see the kingdom of God demonstrated with power. And secondly, we see the king proclaimed with boldness. We see the king proclaimed with boldness.

Matthew Parris is a journalist for the British newspaper, The Times. And in 2008, he traveled to his home country of Malawi to report on some British charities that were working there. And when he returned, he wrote about his time there. And I think the title of his article is very telling. The title of his article is, As an Atheist, I Truly Believe Africa Needs God. And here is what he says in his article.

He says, The trip to Malawi inspired me, renewing my flagging faith in developing development charities. But traveling in Malawi refreshed another belief too, one I've been trying to banish all my life, but an observation I've been unable to avoid since my African childhood. It confounds my ideological beliefs, stubbornly refuses to fit my worldview, and has embarrassed my growing belief that there is no God. Now a confirmed atheist, I've become convinced of the enormous contribution that Christian evangelism makes in Africa. Sharply distinct from the work of secular NGOs, government projects, and international aid efforts, these alone will not do. Education and training alone will not do. In Africa, Christianity changes people's hearts. It brings a spiritual transformation. The rebirth is real. The change is good.

I used to avoid this truth by applauding, as you can, the practical work of mission churches in Africa. It's a pity, I would say, that salvation is part of the package. But Christians black and white working in Africa do heal the sick, do teach people to read and write, and only the severest kind of seculars could see a mission hospital or school and say the world would be better without it. I would allow that if faith was needed to motivate missionaries to help, then fine. But what counted was the help, not the faith? But this doesn't fit the facts. Faith does more than support the missionary.

[ 15 : 24 ] It is also transferred to his flock. This is the effect that matters so immensely and which I cannot help observing. As a convinced atheist, Matthew Parris was confronted with an inconvenient truth, that Jesus changes people. And the change that he brings is real, and it is powerful. And that is why Paul's ministry not only involves the demonstration of the kingdom indeed, but the proclamation of the king and word. Verses 11 through 16 chronicle the rest of the journey from Malta to Rome, after they find a seaworthy ship that can take them the rest of the way. And when Paul gets there, he continues to remain under house arrest with the Roman guard. And then in verses 17 through 22, Paul calls the local Jewish leaders together and asks to speak with them. He tells a story of how he got to Rome, of though how he was innocent, that he was put on trial in Jerusalem. And because he didn't think he was going to get a fair trial, he appeals to Caesar as a Roman citizen. And they respond and they say, we haven't heard of you. We don't know anything about you, but we'd be happy to hear from you. And so Paul gathers them together, and this is where we pick it up in verse 23. Luke says that when they had appointed a day for him, they came to him in his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening, he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God, and trying to convince them about

Jesus from both the law of Moses and from the prophets. Now, Luke here doesn't give us a direct quoted sermon from Paul, but instead what he does is he tells us that the content of Paul's message was that he testified to the kingdom and tried to convince them from the law and the prophets about Jesus. And I actually want to spend a couple minutes teasing this out for a second, because we actually see this wording come up again and again throughout the book of Acts. What does it mean that Paul is teaching about the kingdom and trying to convince them about Jesus from the law and the prophets?

What is he doing there? Like, what is the connection between the kingdom and the law and the prophets? The connection is that Jesus is the king that the entire Old Testament points towards and foreshadows.

The law and the prophets was a way of saying the entire Old Testament. So Jesus is the king that the entire Old Testament foreshadows, but he is a king that no one in Paul's audience could have imagined, that not one of us could have imagined. Jesus is the hero of every story that Moses tells.

He's the true and better Adam, who truly bore God's image and who passed the test in the garden, a much tougher garden, and whose one act of righteousness brings salvation to all. He's the true and better Abraham, who kept God's covenant and through whom all the nations are blessed.

[ 18 : 21 ] He's the true and better Isaac, who actually did take the knife from his father up on the mountain, the father who gave his son, his only son. He's the true and better Joseph, who suffered unjustly at the hands of his brothers, but whose suffering brought hope and redemption to his people.

Jesus is the hero of every story that Moses tells. He also obeys the law that Moses reveals. He fully embodies the love of God and neighbor that the law requires. He's the sacrificial lamb and the great high priest, the one whose sacrifice brings full and final atonement for sins. He's the one who takes the curse of the law so that you and I might receive the blessing of the law.

Jesus is the singer of every psalm, the poet and the sage of all wisdom literature. He's the God of tears who laments with his people. He is the asker of and the answer to the question, how long, O Lord?

He is the prophet who both speaks truth to God's people and who fulfills all the promises the prophets make. He is the king who will come to deliver his people. He's the judge who will set all things right in justice. He is the new temple who will come to dwell on earth. He is the groom who will marry his bride, the church. This is what it means for Paul to proclaim the kingdom and to proclaim Jesus from the law and the prophets. It means that all of the Old Testament anticipates, longs for, foreshadows, hopes for promises is fulfilled in him. And this is why demonstrating the kingdom with deeds is necessary, but by itself is insufficient for Christian mission. We must also proclaim the king of the kingdom.

Our acts of love and compassion are not enough for people to fully experience the kingdom of God. They must know about the savior king who they are made for and who longs for them and who has rescued them in love. Second Corinthians four or five says, we do not preach ourselves, but we preach Jesus as a Lord. That is what it means to bear witness to the kingdom. And so how does Paul's audience respond to this message? How do they respond? We pick it up in verse 24.

[ 20 : 31 ] And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement. The Holy Spirit was right and saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet, go to this people and say, you will indeed hear, but never understand.

And you will indeed see, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull and with their eyes they can barely hear, and with their eyes they have closed. With their ears they can barely hear, and with their eyes they have closed. Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart in turn, and I would heal them. Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen. This is a common pattern in Paul's ministry. He goes and he preaches the gospel. Some are convinced, others disbelieve.

There's a mixed response. And Paul quotes to them from Isaiah the prophet to diagnose their core problem wasn't a lack of intelligence. It wasn't a lack of education. It wasn't a lack of Bible knowledge. It was hearts that were hardened by sin. It was the inability to spiritually hear and see.

And this would be a reminder to us that faithfulness in proclaiming the kingdom and faithfulness in proclaiming the king doesn't always result in changing people's minds and hearts. Paul and even Jesus himself experienced that some hearts were too hard, some eyes were too blind, some ears were too deaf.

And as we seek to share the gospel with others, we should not only pray for boldness and for courage ourselves, we should pray for soft hearts. We should pray for open ears. We should pray for open eyes.

[ 22 : 02 ] Because it's through the Holy Spirit and him softening hearts that anyone can believe. Ephesians 2 says that the ability to believe, even the ability to believe in the gospel is a gift itself from God. And so despite the hardness of heart and the unbelief of Paul's audience, despite all that, the book of Acts ends on a high note. It ends on a really encouraging note. The final two verses, verses 30 and 31, tells us that he, Paul, lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. With all boldness and without hindrance. This is an interesting statement because, I don't know about you, but as I've looked at the book of Acts, and as we've studied this book, it just looks like there is one hindrance after another for the early church. One hindrance after another for Paul's ministry. Here in this chapter alone, Paul faces a storm, a shipwreck, a deadly snakebite, hard hearts, deaf ears. He's living under house arrest, right? Those all sound like hindrances to me.

Those all sound like obstacles. But Luke says, without hindrance and with all boldness. I think this is an incredible way to end the book of Acts. That if we look back to Acts chapter one, and we remember this moment in Acts chapter one, where it's after Jesus's resurrection, and it's before his ascension, and the disciples are gathered around him in Jerusalem.

The gospel has yet to spread around the Mediterranean. There's no church in Ephesus. There's no church in Corinth. There's no church in Thessalonica or Athens. Jesus looks at this group of disciples, and they're probably anxious. They're probably really unsure about what is coming next. And he looks at them, and he says, 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. And the incredible thing is that as we go through the book of Acts, we see that this comes true. That the gospel spreads from Jerusalem, and Judea, and Samaria, to the ends of the earth, all around the Mediterranean, and even now to Rome, through the demonstration of the kingdom in deeds, and the proclamation of the king in words. And what's more even incredible than this final capstone of the book of Acts, is that you and I today are the continuation of this story.

We are the continuation of this mission. Since Acts 28, the baton has been passed from one generation of disciples to the next. And now the baton of the mission of God is in our hands. This is our moment.

We have been part, we have been invited to be part of the inbreaking of God's kingdom into the world, and the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth. This is the North Star for your life. There is no greater story. There is no greater mission. There is no greater purpose to be part of.

[ 25 : 04 ] This is what it is all about, to see God's glory and his kingdom spread throughout the whole earth. And you and I get to be part of it. And that's incredible. Our vision as a church involves both kingdom demonstration and kingdom proclamation. Our vision is that we want to see the gospel spread throughout Washington, D.C. and beyond to the ends of the earth. And that as the kingdom is proclaimed, as more and more people become followers of Jesus and who embody the gospel, we will believe, we believe that we will see the kingdom of God demonstrated. We will see, we believe that we will see loneliness eradicated. We will see neighborhoods become more vibrant and communal.

We will see workplaces become more humane. We will see racial healing accelerated. We will see institutional corruption cease. We will see the arts imbued with beauty and hope and people becoming more truly human. And we believe that one day we will see this city as a place not centered around human power and influence, but one centered around the king, where Jesus Christ is worshiped and glorified and whose reign of peace and justice is fully and finally here. And I know that all of us in this room right now, as we think about that, as we think about that vision, I know that we could probably come up with a long list of things that feel like hindrances to that vision, that feel like obstacles to that vision. You know, the Delta variant, political polarization, the challenges of a secular culture, right? And on and on we could go. We could come up with a long list of hindrances.

But we have every reason to face these things with boldness. In the midst of these things, the gospel goes forward. In the midst of these things, the kingdom is demonstrated and the kingdom is proclaimed because we have a king who is without hindrance. We have a king who is unhindered by any of those things. We serve an unhindered Lord who is on his throne as the risen and reigning king who is coming back. And he is with us, his church through his spirit. And that is our hope. That is where we find our boldness in the midst of every hindrance and obstacle that comes our way. And so I think this is an exciting season of our church. I know that there are still hindrances every single day, every single week. But I just want to encourage us as we move forward into what's next, that this is what God has for us. It is this incredible mission that starts in Acts 1, continues through Acts 28. It is the mission of God that we're part of, that we get to demonstrate his kingdom with love and we get to proclaim his, we get to proclaim the king.

Let's pray together. Lord, thank you so much that you are the hero of the book of Acts. That despite all the challenges and obstacles that the early church faced, that you advance your kingdom and you advance your gospel to the ends of the earth. And today you are still doing that. And we're so grateful that we get to be part of that. Lord, would you show each and every one of us what it looks like to be part of your kingdom work in this world, whether it's our daily work and vocations, whether it's in our home, whether it's in our neighborhoods, or show us what it's like.

Show us what it looks like for us to demonstrate your kingdom and to proclaim you as king. Lord, would you fill us with your spirit and give us all boldness as we do this. Pray this in Christ's name.