

World Wide Witness: Mission Continues

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Date: 16 December 2012

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[0 : 00] So give our greetings again to Jess and the kids and to your church as well. So we'll be reading from Acts chapter 28, starting in verse 11 in the Red Church Bibles.

That is page 1126. If anybody needs a Bible, just raise your hand. And Ethan will be happy to bring one to you.

It's page 1126. After three months, we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island. It was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux.

We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. From there, we set sail and arrived at Rehagim. The next day, the south wind came up.

On the following day, we reached Petulia. There we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. The brothers there had heard we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the three taverns to meet us.

[1 : 12] At the sight of these men, Paul thanked God and was encouraged. When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself with a soldier to guard him. Three days later, he called together the leaders of the Jews.

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.

They examined me and wanted to release me because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had any charge to bring against my own people.

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 his chain. They replied, We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of the brothers who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you.

But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect. They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day and came, in even larger numbers, to the place where he was staying.

[2 : 22] From morning till evening, he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the law of Moses and from the prophets. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe.

They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement. The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet, Go to this people and say, You will be ever hearing but never understanding.

You will be ever seeing but never perceiving. 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.

I would heal them. Therefore, I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen. For two whole years, Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him.

Boldly and without hindrance, he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. Thanks very much, Ryan.

[3 : 46] Well, let's pray. Pray. Pray. Pray. Pray. Pray. Pray. Pray. Pray. Pray. Pray. Our Father God, thank you for this book of Acts that we have been able to read together over the last number of weeks.

Thank you for its message. And we pray that this message would continue to shape us corporately and together as your church, that we would always be people about your work understanding the ways in which you work and living life according to your plans we pray for your Holy Spirit to be at work amongst us this morning that we may not only hear but truly perceive that we would not only see but that we would understand soften our hearts so that they are not calloused but hearts that are soft to receive from you and to be shaped by you and we pray this in Jesus name Amen well this morning we do come to the end of Acts over the last while we have been tracing God's promise that we read about in chapter 1 verse 8 you should remember it the promise that said you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes down on you and you will be my witness as he said in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth that the good news of Jesus would go to all peoples of all nations of every language and every people group because the story of Acts the whole message of Acts is about the outworking of that promise so chapters 1 to 8 is all about the gospel taking effect in and around the city of Jerusalem as we move to chapters 9 to 12 it's all about the gospel moving out further into the area of Judea and Samaria and then in chapters 13 to 27 it's about the gospel reaching to the ends of the earth and as we follow this pattern we see that as the gospel spreads as the good news goes out churches are being established gospel communities are coming together as people respond in faith to Jesus and they in turn begin to tell other people and begin to live out a gospel centered life and these other churches are established and this is the pattern the whole way through and this is what's been happening so when we finally get to Acts chapter 28 there is a sense in which we're saying this is mission accomplished that the promise has now been fulfilled but in reality Acts is only the end of the beginning in other words Acts 28 is a launch pad for the continuation of God's mission Ryan who just read for us and Jess who the family that have been with us belong to a church back in the states that is part of a network called Acts 29 and you might be looking here and thinking well where's Acts 29 well that's the point the idea is is that churches today are writing the next chapter in other words that we are living out this continued mission we are being what God has called us to be so as we do get to the end of Acts 28 there is a sense this is the end of the beginning but in another sense this is the beginning of all that God will continue to do through his church as he equips the church and empowers the church by his Holy Spirit so there's three big things that I want us to take away as we move out of Acts that we are going to take with us as we begin to live out what it is to be an Acts 29 church there are three things that we are going to look at that God is sovereign over his mission people are going to reject the risen Jesus but gospel ministry continues unhindered and in some ways these three big themes that come out of the end of Acts are great big themes that we see throughout the whole book they are a summary they are a summary of the whole book so let's look at them in turn first

God is sovereign over his mission there is a very small statement here in verse 14 but it has huge significance we read it at the very end of verse 14 chapter 28 and so we came to Rome it's a little travel detail but behind it stands God's sovereignty over his mission Paul had started his journey towards Rome at least four months ago back in chapter 27 on the journey on the board the boat he endured a hurricane first fourth storm verse 20 of chapter 27 when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging we finally gave up all hope of being saved not only did he face a hurricane fourth storm he faced the threat of being killed by soldiers verse 42 the soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping but after that he encountered a poisonous snake chapter 28 verse 3

[10:19] Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and as he put it on the fire a viper that's a very poisonous snake driven out by the heat fastened itself on his hands but in each circumstance of his life or in each circumstance of these events his life was spared and so we read and so we came to Rome God is sovereign over his mission not even storms not even soldiers not even poisonous snakes can hinder all that God intends to do and that has been the repeated message the whole way through Acts that God will see that his message is preached that his messenger will always be preserved for the task that they have called to do and that his mission will prevail nothing and no one can stand in God's way it's ironic that as Paul boards the boat for the final leg of his journey in verse 11 of chapter 28 we read that it was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux they were the twin sons of Zeus Zeus was the god of the sea the great protector of all who travel on the sea well the reality is Zeus did nothing to protect the ship in the storm they were all shipwrecked and the cargo was lost so I think Luke is using a bit of irony here to highlight

the fact that this is God who rules the waves and it is God who is watching over his servants a fact that Paul was quick to acknowledge in verse 15 the brothers there had heard that we were coming and they travelled as far as the forum of Appius that's kind of like the major motorway at that time and the three taverns to meet us at the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged you see Paul knew that God is sovereign over his mission and so he gratefully gives thanks to God for his protection for his care upon his life and for bringing him to Rome now as we continue on in this mission today there are two things that we need to remember that flow out of this and the first is this that God is sovereign over our life

God is in control over every detail of your life you live where you live you work where you work you're in the family that you're in because God has ordered your life in this particular way yes we make decisions we make choices but they are all under the sovereign hand of God that means that God will only allow in your life what he wills and what he permits it doesn't mean to say we always understand it but God will only allow in your life what he wills and he permits and he will use it for his greater purpose of mission in fact he will keep you and he will preserve you for the purpose of his mission and when your day comes when the Lord Jesus will call you home it will not be a day too early or a day too late

God is sovereign over our life and God is sovereign secondly over our world God's in control over every aspect of this world he has absolute power over nature he has supreme authority over the rulers nothing and no one can stand in the way of God and his mission and our part in it God has made a promise and God is going to keep that promise his mission has started his mission will continue and one day the Lord Jesus will return and it will be accomplished it's all heading in a victorious conclusion he is sovereign over our life and sovereign over our world so in response we need to pray that God would change us to fit in with his plans and his mission rather than thinking that

God exists for me and for my plans and my ideas that we continually say God change me to fit in to what you are doing in my life and what you are doing in this world so let's take with us the fact that God is sovereign over his mission second and this is a hard one people will reject the risen Jesus one of the most painful struggles in mission is that we will meet people who will reject Jesus Christ once in Rome Paul arranges to meet with some of the Jewish leaders we read of that in verse 23 they arranged to meet Paul on a certain day and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying from morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about

[16:23] Jesus from the law and Moses and from the prophets that's basically from the Old Testament he began to talk about Jesus the good news of Jesus Christ was Paul's priority that was his love that was his joy that was his desire and as we see in verse 23 he began to explain to them or declare to them about the kingdom of God the kingdom of God is God's promise to restore broken lives and renew this disordered world and as he tried to convince them and persuade them the only way that this kingdom was going to come about would be through Jesus Christ Jesus was God's promised king come into the world to establish a new kind of kingdom a kingdom of peace and justice the absence of all suffering and evil a place where we'll no longer turn on the news or open up our newspapers and read about a shooting in a school we'll no longer hear the tragedy of another girl committing suicide because they cannot cope a kingdom where death and disorder are destroyed and life and beauty reign forever and Jesus proved all of this by his resurrection from the dead defeating it all the people who have lost loved ones in recent days long for life to return

Jesus Christ has conquered death and he alone can give true and eternal life he can give life resurrection life but the only way that people can be part of this kingdom was by repentance turning to Jesus and faith and trusting in Christ and this is the same message that we read all the way through Acts page after page it was the same wonderful glorious message of Christ who has come to bring about an eternal kingdom and the response was the same look at verse 24 some were convinced by what he said some believed and they entered into that kingdom but others would not believe despite all the evidence from scripture despite the proof that

Jesus had risen from the dead despite the eyewitnesses who had seen him and told others that they had seen him they continued in their refusal to believe and accept and why wouldn't they believe what was wrong well look at verse 25 they disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement he said to them the Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet in other words he was saying what was true of

your fathers in their rejection is now true of you verse 26 go to this people and say you will be ever hearing but never understanding you will be ever seeing but never perceiving the reason people do not accept

Jesus but reject the risen Jesus as well as he says there in verse 26 it's their deaf ears of course people do hear the claims of Jesus there's nothing wrong with their physical hearing but they fail to hear with understanding not that it's complicated it's such a simple message it's not difficult to grasp they just simply do not want to act on what they hear but it's not just their deaf ears it's also their blind eyes of course people could see there's nothing wrong with their physical eyesight but they fail to perceive to see that the truth is in the person of Jesus Christ and that they need to turn to him it's not that it's hard to know what's right they just don't want it and deaf ears and blind eyes are just a symptom of the heart look at verse 27 for this people's heart has become calloused they hardly hear with their ears and they have closed their eyes the more people reject the gospel the harder their hearts become in fact the danger is that their hearts will become so hard that they will be unable to turn look at the rest of verse 27 otherwise they might see with their eyes hear with their ears understand with their hearts and turn and I would heal them it's one of the most painful things as we go about our mission is that we will meet people who do not want

Jesus and very often it can be friends that are close to us people within our family and I can't make anybody's ears open up to God I can't make anybody see I can't soften anybody's heart but as we've seen all the way through Acts the only person who can do that is the person of the Holy Spirit as he begins to work in people's lives do you remember Lydia that we read about and God opened her heart so we need to pray that God by his Holy Spirit will soften people's hearts we need to ask that God by his Spirit will open up blind eyes and will unblock deaf ears and enable people to see the beauty of who Jesus is and hear the truth of Jesus sometimes we need to pray more than try and tell because it is only

[23 : 28] Christ by the Holy Spirit working in people's lives that their hearts will become soft and they will welcome Jesus but there's a third thing that comes from this that I think sums up the whole of Acts that gospel ministry continues unhindered yes there is opposition yes there has been rejection we have seen that throughout people were imprisoned people were stoned to death it is a journey of suffering but the mission of God continues look at verse 30 for two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ commentators helpfully point out that the very last word in the book of Acts in the original is the word unhindered that's the very last word that's the very last word so verse 31 should read something like this

I don't say this often but here you go get a pen out and scribble it ok this is what it should be Paul preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ boldly and unhindered kind of like dot dot dot it's not the end is it Acts closes with Paul under house arrest but yet his gospel ministry continues he's there welcoming everybody who will come to him and he's able to speak freely about Jesus Paul would later write in one of his letters he says I am suffering in chains but God's word is not chained God's people may suffer God's people may be imprisoned but the word of God and the gospel can never be chained or held back it's remarkable to think that the end of Acts is 30 years after Jesus spoke to his disciples just before his ascension and he spoke to his disciples and he gave the promise in chapter 1 verse 8 that they would be witnesses to the ends of the earth and 30 years later God has placed his witness in Rome in the very capital of the greatest empire God has his man at the center of the world's greatest power preaching unhindered about the kingdom of God isn't that incredible and the subtlety of this should not be lost the Roman empire may have been the greatest empire the world has ever seen but it's no more is it it's the kingdom of God that's eternal and God had his witness right there at the very heart of that capital and Caesar may have been a victorious conqueror he may have gone through many lands and he may have won them all over but Caesar's dead in his grave his empire is no more but Jesus is the risen king who's conquered death itself reigning and ruling from heaven this is what Acts 28 is telling us you might be asking yourself well what happened to Paul what happened after these two years well Luke doesn't tell us does he did he stand trial before Caesar he might have did he get to Spain as he had planned he could have done we just don't know but that's the point it's not important for us to know what happened Paul because this isn't a book about Paul it's not a book about his life it's about the risen

Jesus Christ who rules and reigns over all and who will continue his mission through his people and through his church unhindered like many of the witnesses that we have met throughout acts we too are going to face opposition and in many churches and in many countries today they face persecution there will be hardship there will be suffering simply because we follow Christ but through it all God is going to save his people and he's going to build his church and he's going to reach the nations and his mission will be accomplished it may start out as being the end of the beginning but we are now firmly placed at the beginning of the end as we sit here today we are in acts 29 territory all this has gone before us and so much more has happened and so much more is still to happen and what's our legacy going to be when we're passed through this life what will be the legacy of your life the legacy of this church in relation to God's mission there are still people groups that are unreached there are still towns in Ireland without a gospel believing church we all have friends and we all have family who do not yet know

[29 : 47] Christ as their Lord and Saviour but that's why we have been rescued that's why we're in God's kingdom because God's purpose for you is to keep living out the mission where you are and I pray that God will fill us and fill this church by the power of his Holy Spirit that we would be people who pray for his mission that we would give for his mission and that we would go for his mission let's pray that right now we thank you so much for

Jesus we thank you for the good news of the kingdom of God that Jesus Christ is risen has defeated death destroyed evil and through our hope in you we have life today and life eternal thank you that you are sovereign over our life sovereign over every family represented here ruler over this world we pray that by the power of your Holy Spirit you would soften hard hearts open up people's eyes unblock their deaf ears that they may welcome Jesus into their life and their families and we pray that you would fill us and that you would fill this church with the power of your

Holy Spirit that we would be a people who pray that we would be a people who give and that we would be people who go father work through us we pray in all of our weaknesses and in all our failures and all our upsets and in everything that goes wrong you are working your plan out and we praise you that it's not up to us but you working through us please help us and we thank you for your mission and for calling us to be a part of it Amen we're going to sing I guess we don't normally associate this with being a Christmas carol but in some ways it does remind us of the incarnation of Christ entering into the world for us but with

Christ entering into the world he calls us to follow him to bring our lives as a daily offering of worship to the servant king so may this be our prayer in response to what we've been looking at through Acts and may we live this mission out together as his people let's pray