

God is unstoppable

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[0 : 00] So much, Harha, for reading that for us. We've just read God's word. Let's ask him to help us as we look at this now.! Amen.

So, Jesus gave the mission, didn't he? To Jerusalem and beyond. And I think we've been seeing in the book of Acts that God's plans are unstoppable.

You can't stop God's plans. God has planned for Paul to get to Rome. But this morning, where has Paul found himself?

Can someone have a look at verse 1 and let me know? Where has Paul found himself? Let's ask someone young and let's ask an older one.

So, Gracie, I think you're up first. Malta, absolutely. Can we check with an older one? Verse 1, where do you think Paul is?

[1 : 21] Do you agree with Gracie? There's some nods. Good. We're there. We're together. We're in Malta this morning. That's where Paul has found himself. And if you went to visit Malta, you might visit this place.

This is apparently St. Paul's Bay, where supposedly Paul and his crew landed after the shipwreck. So, we're in Malta.

There's even a church named after Paul. It's called St. Paul of the shipwreck. It's called St. Paul of the shipwreck church. And I think this island just looks lovely. Has anybody been to Malta?

A few hands up. Nice. It's not too late to book your summer holiday. Perhaps you're inspired this morning. It looks lovely. It looks lovely. And so, Paul is in Malta.

He's awaiting to get to Rome. He's not far. But maybe this is an opportunity on such a lovely island for Paul to put his feet up, relax by the sea, before he makes his way to Rome, where things are going to be busy.

[2 : 28] He's going to prepare to be on trial before Caesar. But no, it's far more dramatic than that. Have a look down at verse 3 in your Bible.

Have a look down at verse 3. And again, perhaps hands up. But we'll ask a few people, what happens to Paul? Is it a relaxing holiday?

Isaac. When he's gathering a pile of brushwood, a viper comes out. A viper comes out, yes. And what does the viper do to Paul?

It bites him. Excellent. Thank you, Isaac. Older ones, do you agree? Not just the children this morning. Excellent. Paul is bit by a snake.

That wasn't what we wanted. We wanted Paul to put his feet up. It's been a long, hard journey on the ship. There's been shipwreck. But no, Paul just runs into more danger.

[3 : 37] He's bitten by a viper. And clearly, the locals think, Paul's a goner. Have a look at verse 4. When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, this man must be a murderer.

For though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live. This is a dead man, they think. But actually, we find a miracle is on our hands.

Have a look. Verse 5. But Paul shook off the snake into the fire and suffered no ill effects. The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead. But after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said, He was a god.

He lives. It's a miracle. Let's worship Paul. No, don't worship Paul. Don't worship Paul. This is God's plan in action.

God's plans are unstoppable. Don't worship Paul. Worship his gods. He's the one who has been keeping Paul safe here.

[4 : 45] God intends for Paul to get to Rome and not even a snake can get in the way of that. God's plans. And that's good for us to hear this morning.

God's plans are unstoppable. God's plans for your life are unstoppable. They cannot fail. He will keep us safe until the day that he chooses for us to not be here anymore. There's an old bishop of Liverpool.

He's died now. He's with the Lord. But he said some wonderful things. And here's one of them. He said, All the powers of the world cannot take away my life until God permits, until God chooses. All the physicians, that's doctors of earth, cannot preserve it when God calls me away. God will keep me here on this earth until he decides not to.

[5 : 50] Our lives are safe in his hands. Because his plans for our life are unstoppable. And that's good for us all to hear.

But unlike Paul, none of us have been promised that in a year from now we're going to make it to Rome. None of us know what tomorrow will bring.

But all of us can recognize that every day, all our time is held in God's hand. And it's been given to us by him.

And so whether God gives us just a few weeks or months or many, many years, perhaps we're going to live to a hundred, we can know that they have been given.

Those years, those days, they've been given by our God. And we can be inspired by Paul about how to live. If he chooses to live his life entirely for God's, entirely for his service, entirely to make him known.

[6 : 59] He makes the most of every opportunity to live for God, to tell others about him, to pray for others. And that's how we should live our life too.

Every day has been given to us by him. And so perhaps it would be a good idea, perhaps every day this week, to wake up and pray, Father, thank you for giving me this day.

Please help me to live for you. That would be a great prayer to pray when you wake up in the morning. Every day has been given by God.

And God's plans for your life, they're unstoppable. That's good news for us to hear this morning. Now, finally, after three months aboard the ship, sorry, three months on the island of Malta, Paul gets aboard another ship.

Uh-oh. But don't worry, there's no storm this time. And verse 14 tells us where he makes it to. Verse 14, there we found some brothers and sisters who invited us to spend a week with them.

[8 : 19] And so we came to Rome. Paul has made it. He's made it to Rome. And at that point, all of us should go hooray.

Because Paul has made it to Rome. God's plans for him really are unstoppable. But it's not been a smooth journey.

There's been the shipwreck. There's been the snake bite. We heard about that this morning. It's not all been easy. God said, you'll make it to Rome, but it hasn't gone easily.

It could have done. God could have just allowed him to get there really simply. But that's usually not how things in life work, is it?

I don't know if anybody's been watching the tennis over the last few weeks. But if you're a tennis fan, things don't always go very smoothly. We were excited at the beginning of Wimbledon.

[9 : 23] And so many Brits were in it. And this year, Jack Draper, number four seed, surely he'll make it to the semifinal, people said. And maybe even the final.

But it's not been all smooth and easy for him. In fact, he went out in round two. If you're a tennis fan, you know that things won't always be straightforward.

And if you're a football fan, you'll know things won't always be straightforward. England women are playing in the Euros at the moment. And they came in having won the last European Championships.

First game, what happens? They lose to France. Things don't go as we think they might go. Not everything is going to go smoothly.

And that's been the same for Paul. Look, he's been arrested. He's been on trial. He's been in a storm and a shipwreck. And he had a snake bite. But every difficulty that Paul faced was an opportunity.

[10 : 34] Paul arrested meant that he could speak to Felix, who was on trial before, and his wife, Drusilla. He could speak to Festus. He could speak to King Agrippa.

All about Jesus. Jesus who saved him. Jesus who rose from the dead. That difficulty of Paul being arrested and on trial, that brings opportunities.

And the shipwreck. There were 275 other people on board that ship. And Paul had the opportunity to say, this is a difficulty, but look, I have faith in God.

And that's true of our lives too. Do we see difficulties, setbacks, as hard as they might be, as opportunities?

Opportunities. Opportunities to meet people you would have never met before. Which may give you opportunities to say, I've got faith in God.

[11 : 39] Opportunities to learn more about God and how he's in control of our lives. Even when things feel very out of control. Like, if it was down to Paul, he would have got to Rome some time ago.

But God's the one in control. And if it's down to us, perhaps we would have got that dream job a year ago. Or if it's down to us, we would have passed that exam already.

Or if it was down to us, we would have moved house by now. But for some reason, that's not happened. We haven't passed that exam because God wants us to learn some more things.

And help us to trust him more. God hasn't given us that new house yet because he still has people on our road he wants us to talk to and get to know better.

Difficulties are opportunities. Nothing is wasted in God's plans. In God's unstoppable plans for your life.

[12 : 46] They're opportunities. We're going to pause there. We're going to sing a couple of songs.

The first one helps us to be thankful to God for every day that he gives to us. The last few verses says, Every day I have on earth is given by the king.

So I will give my life and all to love and follow him. And then we'll sing. Thank you, David and Mercy, for leading us in those songs. Thank you for good singing.

Let's turn again to Acts chapter 28. And this time I've asked Ray to come and read for us. Thank you, Ray. We'll do a shuffle.

I'll go that way. There we go. Hello?

[13 : 53] Yes. Acts chapter 27, verse 17. Three days later, he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, Paul said to them, My brothers, though 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 to talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this 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.

[15 : 13] 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 to 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 and hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn, and I would heal them.

[16 : 22] 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, Ray, for reading.

God's plans are unstoppable. And we've seen that because Paul has made it to Rome. Hooray! That is good news this morning.

Jesus' plan to Jerusalem and beyond really is being worked out. But what's the job?

What's the task? Because it's not just to travel the world and go on some amazing adventures and have some dramatic stories to tell of shipwreck and snake bites.

[17 : 46] It's far, far better than that. It's to tell people about Jesus. It's to tell people that they can be part of his kingdom.

Have a look at verse 23. Have a look at what Paul says as he meets some people. Verse 23, they arranged to meet Paul on a certain day and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying.

He witnessed to them from morning till evening explaining about the kingdom of God and from the law of Moses and the prophets. He tried to persuade them about Jesus.

Paul's job is to tell people about Jesus. Just as Jesus said at the beginning of Acts, you will be my witnesses from Jerusalem and beyond to the ends of the earth.

telling people, showing people about me, about the Savior that they can have in me. But not everyone wants to hear.

[19 : 00] Do you see that in verses 26 to 27? Paul is probably quite sad as he says these words because they're speaking particularly about his own people that not all of them will want to hear.

In fact, it's so bad. Let me show you what it's like. Can I have my volunteer? We arranged this earlier. There you go. Stand at the front. These people, Paul says, are like this.

They are blind. So of course it's an orange blindfold. They are blind. Can you see anything? No. Can't see anything.

Can't see you, your lovely faces. Can't see the light. Can't see that Jesus can be his Savior. Nor can they hear.

They are deaf and blind. Can you hear much? No. Says hardly hear. He can hear a bit. Hardly hear. We'll go with that.

[20 : 07] Thank you, Isaac. Stay there just for a moment. Paul says, these people, they're deaf. They're blind. They hardly hear anything. Nothing goes in.

Like you talk to them and they haven't heard a word. Perhaps you might know what that's like. Particularly if you're talking to a man. I will listen to people, but it doesn't always go in.

Sorry if I've done that to you. And that's what these people are like, Paul says. I tell them about Jesus, but I might as well not. Because it's not going in.

And it's sad because they can't see that they need Jesus to save them. Thank you, Isaac. We'll let you hear and see again.

Thank you. Great job. Paul says to them, when you say you don't believe, this is what you're like.

[21 : 09] You are blind. You're deaf. You don't understand that God's message means salvation. It's good news. But for Paul, knowing that every day he has, has been given by God, and is part of God's unstoppable plan to bring people into his kingdom, Paul, even though there are people that hardly hear and won't see that Jesus can be their savior, he's still going to tell people about him.

And he's still going to tell people, even though, look at what Paul's situation is. Verse 20. 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 this chain.

Paul is still a prisoner when he arrives in Jerusalem. He has a chain, as the video showed us, perhaps a Roman guard in his house.

He's not free. And yet, even though he's a prisoner for telling people about Jesus, he's still going to keep telling people about Jesus.

It's a difficulty, but it just brings another opportunity. And if you know Jesus as your savior this morning, you get to be part of God's unstoppable plan too.

[22 : 46] Paul and the other disciples, they're not here, but God's mission for him to be made known around the world is still something we need to be part of.

And so, we can trust that as we make Jesus known to people, we are part of this unstoppable plan. And even if people were like Isaac here at the front, even if people have their ears closed and their eyes shut and just don't see it, we still keep telling people.

And we trust that God is at work and will save all those that he has chosen. And so, that plan, at the moment, is unfinished.

There are people in this city who do not yet know about Jesus and there are people around the world who still don't yet know about Jesus. And this map behind us, all the red dots are places where Jesus still needs to be made known in the world.

And particularly, lots of places around Asia and middle of Africa, but other red dots around the world, different countries and people groups that have not yet heard of Jesus.

[24 : 07] The work is still going on today. Acts might be nearly at a close, but that mission to Jerusalem beyond continues and will continue until the day that the Lord Jesus returns.

We can, this morning, thank God, can't we, that this country has had people come to it and people have told others about the Lord Jesus.

We can thank God that people have come into our lives and told us about the Lord Jesus and that we're part of this kingdom. How we long that more people in our city who haven't heard and around the world who haven't heard might come to know him too.

And we're all a part of that. Whether we stay here in Brighton or whether we move to somewhere in Asia to tell people who've never heard, we're part of that mission.

And it is unstoppable. Let's pray. Let's ask God that he would use us in that. And then we'll sing a couple of songs to close.

[25 : 30] Our Heavenly Father, thank you that your mission for Jesus to be made known around the world to the ends of the earth and throughout history is unstoppable.

Thank you for being with Paul and helping him even through difficulties. And Father God, we pray that we ourselves would seek to use the time that you give us each day that you give us to be part of your unstoppable mission to make Jesus known to the world.

Help us, we pray, by your Spirit. Even when there's difficulty, we pray that you'd show us the opportunities. Give us open doors to tell others of him.

And we pray for those lands that haven't yet heard, those people groups that haven't yet heard. We pray, Father, that you would raise up people to go to those places to tell others of Jesus.

And Father, maybe that's even some of us in this room. Lord, lead and guide us, we pray in that. But help us to pray. That's part of it. And we ask this in Jesus' name.

[26 : 49] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Wonderful. Well, we're going to sing two songs to close.