

# Urban Evangelism and the Unchained Gospel in Rome

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning.

My name is Catherine St. Clair, and I'm reading the scripture lesson for today. This is a reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Acts chapter 28, verses 16 to 31.

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 local Jewish leaders.

When they had assembled, Paul said to them, 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.

[ 1 : 13 ] They examined me and wanted to release me because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar.

I certainly did not intend to bring any charge 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 this chain. They replied, We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people 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.

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

[ 2 : 25 ] 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 ancestors. 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. And 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. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

- [ 3 : 41 ] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Thank you for that scripture reading.
- Good morning, Christ Church. My name is Andrew. I'm one of the pastors here. We're so glad to be worshipping with you. Like Jonathan said, we'd love to chat with you afterwards if you're new over coffee. We also have a deacon, Gabriel.
- He's that guy in the bright orange lanyard. He's here to pray for you if you'd love that as well. Jonathan and I would like to pray for you as well, if that's something that you feel like you could use this morning. So, welcome again to Christ Church.
- Will you join me in prayer as we come to hear what God has to say to us this morning?  
Our Father, the enemy would have us to disregard your word.
- The enemy would have me fail in preaching your truths this morning. The enemy would have all the people here listening, distracted from what you have to say.
- [ 4 : 42 ] But you're greater than he who is in the world. And we give you praise for that. So, would you bless the preaching of your word? Would it be less of me and more of you?
- And would we be amazed at the power of your holy word, inspired by your wonderful spirit, who longs to do amazing things in and through us, fallible us.
- We pray all these things in the name of Jesus. Amen. Well, Christ Church, today is the last sermon in our series in the book of Acts. And actually, we've been in Acts since April, so it's been quite a while.
- Chelsea has been saying to me, Andrew, your sermons are starting to sound the same. You know, maybe we had a little bit too much of Acts. No, it's okay. It's just my lack of being a good preacher. But here we are at the end of Acts.
- We're going to head into Deuteronomy next, but we're going to close it out right now. And today, we're skipping ahead quite a bit. We're going from last week, where Jonathan preached from Acts 20 about Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders.
- [ 5 : 47 ] And we're skipping ahead to his imprisonment in Rome, right? In the last 16 verses of this book. But in wrapping up, what I want to do is, I want us to notice, you know, how far we've come in this 28-chapter book known as the Acts of the Apostles, or really what it is, is the Acts of the Holy Spirit in and through the Apostles.
- All right? So I want to take us back a little bit, just give us a brief overview to kind of get us all the way here to the last 16 verses of the book of Acts. So it all began right in chapter 1 with the resurrected Jesus, who spent 40 days of his new resurrected life doing what?
- Preaching and teaching about the kingdom of God. That's what he did right after he was resurrected for those 40 days. He taught about the kingdom of God. And then you have to remember what his disciples asked him as he preached about the kingdom of God.
- They asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? And what did he say? He didn't directly answer the question. He says, you guys are so preoccupied with the timing of the kingdom, but what you really need to know is that you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.
- And while you are so preoccupied with whether or not the kingdom is going to be restored to Israel, to your nation, guess what? I have a bigger plan. And you will be my witnesses from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria, even to the ends of the earth.
- [ 7 : 09 ] And then boom, Jesus says, peace out. He ascends into heaven to the right hand of his Father in heaven. As disciples are left to figure out, okay, now what?
- What's next? He didn't even answer our question about whether or not the kingdom was going to be restored to Israel. So they just wait and they just pray and they stay in community.

And as Jesus said, the spirit does come upon them at Pentecost. The spirit comes upon them and they preach the name of Jesus and they do many signs and wonders in his name. And the poor are lifted up.

And those who are overlooked are looked upon with compassion. And many people begin to join this Jesus movement in Jerusalem. But then what happens? The Jewish establishment, they kill Stephen, right?

The first martyr in the church. And then they send out one of their top Pharisees, Saul, to go and persecute the church. But what happens? The church only scatters and spreads the news about Jesus even further.

[ 8 : 09 ] To Samaritans and Ethiopians. And Saul himself, this great persecutor of the church, he is converted. And what you have is a multi-ethnic church that is formed and born in Antioch, the third largest city in the Roman Empire.

And so it's not the Jerusalem church, but this Gentile populated church now in Antioch that becomes the main headquarters, the main benefactor for the early church's benevolence ministries and its outreach and evangelism mission ministries.

And this church in Antioch, they send Paul even further north, even further east into the Mediterranean world. And the good news about Jesus is preached in all kinds of influential international cities like Athens and Corinth.

And yes, it's often met with resistance. It's often met with dangerous threats. Sometimes even whole cities are uproaring against Paul. Sometimes there's violence and Paul is stoned by Jewish and Gentile communities.

And yet, Christian churches continue to pop up all over the Mediterranean world as more than a few people are persuaded about Jesus. Now that brings us to last week.

[ 9 : 14 ] Last week, Paul said his farewell to the Ephesian elders, marking the end of his third missionary journey. And between then and now, between Acts chapter 20 and today, Acts chapter 28, there's quite a bit that's happened.

After his Ephesian farewell, Paul, led by the Spirit, he says, I feel like I need to go to Jerusalem. So he goes to Jerusalem, and of course, what does he do in Jerusalem? He worships his God in the temple.

But what he also did when he worshiped his God in the temple was he brought his Gentile companions with him, his brothers in Christ who had been converted by his ministry. He brings them into the temple to worship this God that they all worship in the name of Jesus.

But you can imagine now how that looked, right, to the ethnocentric Jewish establishment. And so in Jerusalem, he is confronted by an angry Jewish mob.

They're jealous. These religious leaders who only had eyes for the restoration of their nation and their ethnic culture and not the whole of Israel, not the whole of the people of God, they didn't have eyes to see the beauty of this truly Jewish Jesus movement, how this truly Jewish Jesus movement was accomplishing an amazing thing, extending the hope of Israel to the nations.

[ 10 : 27 ] And so they're offended, and offended by Paul's gospel and offended by Paul's actions, they seek to kill him. And they stir up the whole city against him, and it looks like he's about to get killed, but what happens?

According to God's plan, he's saved. He's protected by who? Actually, he's protected from his people by the Romans who occupied Israel, by the Romans.

And then he's taken up further north to a town called Caesarea, and he stays there for two years, not able to do much other than try to talk to his captors, his prison guards, and even the governor there about Jesus.

That's what he's up to. And eventually, the Jewish establishment, they come up to Caesarea, and they're starting to bring more charges against Paul because they want to see this guy killed. They really want to kill this guy who they believe is anti-Israel.

So they come up to Caesarea, and they bring charges against him that he is against their law. He's offended their law. He's offended their temple. He's even offended Caesar. They're bringing all these charges in the hopes that he will get executed.

[ 11 : 30 ] And Paul says, all right, bet. I appeal to Caesar. Here, let's take it to the highest court in the world and see whose case is stronger. Let's take my message about Jesus to the center stage of the empire before the highest earthly authorities in the land, and let's see.

So he's transported now from Caesarea to Rome on a ship, but he almost doesn't make it. He almost doesn't make it. He goes through a shipwreck, and then the prison guards are like, oh, shoot, all the prisoners are just gonna get away, and we're gonna get in big trouble, so why don't we kill all the prisoners?

And then, because of Paul's reputation, they decide not to after all, and all the prisoners, everyone is saved. And then he goes onto this island in Malta, and he's bit by a poisonous snake.

And then, here we are in Acts chapter 28. He made it to Rome, guys. He made it to Rome. He made it. And through all of this, it's like, will he make it to Rome?

Will God's witnesses truly make it to the ends of the earth? Well, here he is, by the hand of God, in the heart of the Roman Empire at the end of Acts.

[ 12 : 41 ] Now, a question I want us to consider is, well, how might you end this story? What kind of ending might you expect from this story? Paul, this central missionary in the second half of the book of Acts, he's overcome all kinds of adversity, and now he's in the heart of the Roman Empire.

How might you have ended this story? Well, for me, maybe it's just because my oldest, Cammy, is super into Cinderella and Disney princesses right now, but if it were up to me, with my last 16 verses, I'd probably feel the need to vindicate this hero, right?

And write a nice, happy ending with liberty, and victory, and finality, to tell his triumph in Rome, and how the whole empire turned to Jesus, or at least of how Paul, you know, at least avoided execution, and launched a successful church planting movement in Rome.

But is that how this book ends? Is that how this book ends? Is that what we heard a moment ago, read by Catherine St. Clair? No. How does Acts end? It ends with the great apostle Paul in chains, under house arrest.

And really, it kind of underwhelmingly ends with him really just doing the same old thing that he does in all those other chapters. Chelsea was right. He does do the same thing over and over again, right?

[ 13 : 58 ] He goes and he preaches to the Jewish people every single time he enters the city, and then he preaches the same old message, verse 23, about the kingdom of God from the law and the prophets, trying to persuade people about Jesus.

And then, as it says in verse 24, like in many other places, the results are mixed, right? They're just mixed. And then, as was his pattern, he turns his attention to the Gentiles.

That's what he does in verse 28. And then it ends, it just says, he stayed under house arrest for two years, and he just kept doing the same thing. Verse 31, he proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

And that's how this account ends. Not extraordinary, but super ordinary. Super ordinary. And I don't know about you, but doesn't this strike you as kind of a bummer of an ending to this series in the book of Acts?

Like, why does this book of Acts, recorded by the great apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit, why does it end in such an unspectacular and even unsatisfying way?

[ 15 : 05 ] Why is there no surprising last minute, once and for all, final Christian triumph? What we read that happens here in Rome, it isn't much different, really.

Maybe it's even less impressive than what we've seen happen in other chapters in Acts, right? In other cities in the Roman world. Here, we're not even told if there's a happy ending or a sad one.

The author of Acts isn't interested in giving any such details to us. So what kind of story is this? And what's the point? I mean, why would anyone be attracted to the kingdom that is preached by this missionary Apostle Paul here who is imprisoned and unable to even convince his own people about Jesus?

And how could anyone expect to be inspired by a story with such unspectacular and even an unsatisfying ending, right?

Well, for the rest of this sermon, what I wanna do is I wanna make the case that in this ending of Acts, this ending of Acts is actually the perfect ending for expressing Christ's kingdom and inspiring Christ's church, the perfect way to end the book of Acts, particularly in what it teaches us about the kingdom of God and also in what it calls us to do as Christ's church.

[ 16 : 23 ] So first, how does the unspectacular ending we see here in the book of Acts, how does it actually beautifully express the nature of the kingdom of God, of Christ's kingdom? I mean, isn't the kingdom of God, the sphere of God's reign, supposed to be marked with joy and happiness and triumph?

And yet Acts, which began with, it began quite well, right, with the risen Jesus preaching about the kingdom of God, it ends with the preaching about the kingdom of God too, but by this prisoner who's chained and can't even go out.

But what kind of a king would let his great messenger become a prisoner? And what kind of a kingdom could he seriously be preaching in chains? Where was Paul's happy ending?

You know, this week we had youth group twice, once with the older kids and once with the younger kids, and when we were with the older kids, we went over Psalm 1 this past week, this past Wednesday. Blessed is the man that does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly.

You know, he's like a tree planted by streams of water, yielding fruit in its season, whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers, and so on, right? And I challenged our youth.

[ 17 : 31 ] I said, picture, consider what it really means to have a truly blessed life. That's what I want our kids to really pursue, a truly blessed life. And we ended up getting onto the topic of happiness.

And we talked about how God truly does want us to be blessed. God truly does want us to be happy. But then one of the youth said, but isn't that impossible? Isn't it impossible for us to always be happy in this world?

And another one chimed in. He said, yeah, it is impossible. It is. But then he thought about it and he qualified and said, actually, it is impossible until heaven.

Until heaven, right? And see, this is what the ending of Acts confirms to us about the kingdom of God. Yes, the kingdom is inaugurated by the risen and ascended Christ who sits on the throne at the right hand of his Father.

And because of this, we do have an abiding hope, a joy that can never be snuffed out. And yet, this inaugurated kingdom is yet to be consummated. We still pray every week, your kingdom, please come, with grief and with lament.

[ 18 : 43 ] Not without hope, but always keeping it real with God, keeping it real with ourselves, keeping it real with each other. The kingdom is already and the kingdom is not yet.

And that's why Paul could write while chained to a Roman prison guard for two years, in his prison epistles, Colossians 4, he says, remember my chains. And in Philippians 4, he says, rejoice in the Lord always.

And again, I say, rejoice, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. It's already and not yet. And I know for some of us who've been here for a while, it might seem like we talk about this a lot, the alreadyness and the not yetness of Christ's kingdom, but we return to it again and again because it's so important.

See, the unspectacular ending of Acts and Paul's less than ideal circumstances in these last 16 verses are actually quite common to the experience of living in this already not yet kingdom of God.

Living in this kind of kingdom, this already not yet kingdom, there are definitely wins for sure. The kingdom is here. The spirit is already at work. Verse 16 says, the Roman guard showed Paul kindness and let him live in his own house with a guard.

[ 19 : 55 ] Verse 24 says, some people did believe in his message. Verse 31 says, the gospel goes out with boldness and without hindrance. But again, this isn't some ultimate final triumph in Rome.

The kingdom of God is clearly present. God's reign is definitely on display in Paul's preaching and in the people who receive his message and yet, the final victory of God, the final victory of God's people in history has yet to come.

Paul is still in Roman chains in a Roman kingdom. Already and not yet. And the more we Christians internalize this dual reality of the kingdom of God, the better equipped we will be to navigate our complicated, complicated lives.

See, to come to grips, particularly with the not yetness of the kingdom, is to recognize that God doesn't need us to win for him to win. Amen? God doesn't need us to win for him to win.

God doesn't need us to have spectacular lives for him to accomplish his spectacular purposes. No disappointments in and with our lives need ever crush or demoralize us.

[ 21 : 02 ] Our life circumstances don't need to smoothly flow into nice, happy endings for us to be sure that God's kingdom will come and that God's kingdom will endure.

And although the not yetness of his kingdom can seem frustrating, as I'm sure it was for Paul, it is also a beautiful thing. It's also beautiful because implicit in the not yetness of the kingdom is the promise of fulfillment.

Not yet. Not yet. Not yet. Not yet doesn't mean never. It doesn't mean maybe. It simply means not now, but it's definitely coming.

And that's why the book of Acts ends not with Apostle Paul's heroic triumph, an ultimate happy ending, but with a preacher under Roman house arrest, preaching faithfully and seeing a mixed response.

See, the point of this ending is not, hey, what happened to Paul, the hero? How did it all turn out? Well, surely it turned out well for him, right? No. We're not told the end of Paul's story in the book of Acts because the book of Acts isn't a story about the Apostle Paul.

[ 22 : 11 ] It's the story of the Holy Spirit's movement and extension of Christ's witness to the ends of the earth. And in this book, what is so much more important than knowing what happened to Paul is what it says in verse 31, that the kingdom of God, the lordship of Jesus Christ, continued to be proclaimed with all boldness and unhindered.

In and through unfavorable, limited circumstances, the kingdom of God endures and advances in the heart of the Roman Empire. And so rather than discourage us or leave us unsatisfied with such a weak ending to this story, this should actually inspire us to keep going as actors in this unfolding story.

You know, not only does this underwhelming ending in Acts point us to the often unsatisfying experience of Christian living in the kingdom of God, but it also points us beyond itself.

Because again, the point is not that this story is about Paul, it's a story about the work of the Holy Spirit, a work that is largely unfinished. See, in this conclusion of Acts, the author, he's intentionally writing an underwhelming ending.

He's intentionally doing this with no details whatsoever of what happens next for Paul, just ending with the gospel was proclaimed with all boldness and without hindrance.

[ 23 : 32 ] Why? Because the author was not intending to write a definitive the end at the end of the Acts of the Apostles. The author was intending to write to be continued. That's why it ends this way.

It's meant to make us feel, oh, to be continued. And then the question is though, to be continued by who, you ask? By who? Well, by the rest of us, the church, or more accurately, the Holy Spirit working in and through us his church.

See, while the Acts account concluded with Paul in verses 31, the actions of God's Spirit continues with the church even today all throughout the rest of this age until the return of Christ and the consummation of his kingdom.

The story wasn't over. The story isn't over. It was and it is to be continued. Again, see, Christianity is not simply a set of doctrines or beliefs to give your assent to nor is it a list of rules to obey and follow.

It's a wonderful story. It's a wonderful story. It's a grand narrative of what God is up to in this world, what God has been up to since the creation of the world, since the beginning of time.

[ 24 : 46 ] And while God's people have always had a role as actors in this divine drama, the book of Acts, this account of what the earliest followers of Jesus did after he ascended into heaven, the book of Acts marks a unique time in the unfolding of the drama of God's story.

Think of it, think of this history as a Shakespearean play with five acts. You have act one, creation and fall. God creates the world, yet the problem of sin enters upon the scene.

Then act two, Israel. God graciously chooses a people and promises to establish the kingdom that they forfeited at the fall. Then act three, Christ, the king of that kingdom, he enters into history and he inaugurates the kingdom and promises to consummate it upon his return.

And then there are two more acts. The final act is act five, right? New creation, that final rest that we all long for, the consummation of the world, the kingdom that Jesus and the prophets and the apostles all foretold.

This imperishable new heavens and new earth where every tear is wiped away and justice and shalom reign forever and ever. But see, what the book of Acts marks and kicks off, this book, this ending, it kicks off act four.

[ 26 : 04 ] If act one was creation and fall, if act two is Israel, if act three is Christ, and if the last act is new creation, act four is the church age.

That is the act that we inhabit. And what's so unique about act four, this church age, is that unlike the first four acts, the people of God in act four are all uniquely filled with the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

And we're called to improvise rather than just parrot what has already been said in the sacred Hebrew scriptures. We, as a people from every tribe, nation, and tongue are now called in a sense to go beyond the sacred page on history's way to the fifth and final act.

Of course, this doesn't mean we just do whatever we want. It's an age that's guided by the Spirit and we're to remain in character and we're to act consistently with the first three acts and the final act.

But even with these parameters, act four, this age of the church that we presently inhabit as Christians between the two comings of Jesus, it's an age of improvisation, of discerning the Spirit's way in new and diverse contexts, of asking questions of the here and now.

[ 27 : 18 ] What does it look like to worship Yahweh as a woman? A woman in the patriarchal ancient world or a woman today in post-Christian world? What does it look like to worship Yahweh as a slave or a prisoner or a migrant or an oppressed minority?

What does it look like to worship as someone from Africa or Europe or Asia? Just some of the many questions that the church in this act four, in this church age, has been called to work out or perhaps closer to home.

What does it look like to worship Yahweh in this post-Christian secular moment as a software engineer at Google in the Bay Area or as a teacher in the Berkeley or Oakland public school districts or as a PhD student here at Cal and not just on an individualistic level but also on a corporate level?

What does it mean for Christ Church East Bay to worship Yahweh in the midst of our city's homelessness crisis? How is the global church to respond to the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan or the disasters in Haiti or the border crisis that we're facing?

The underwhelming ending in the book of Acts, see, it's a call. It's a call from God to consider how we are to act out and how we are to improvise our roles in Act 4 as the church.

[ 28 : 40 ] How will we be witnesses of Christ to the ends of the earth? Remember at the outset of this book, Acts chapter 1 verse 8, Jesus said to the church, you will be my witnesses.

You will be my witnesses. He didn't say you should be. He didn't say you can be. He didn't say do you want to be? He said you will be. This is what we are.

This is what we are, Christ's church. Whether we play and improvise the role well or not, we are witnesses of Christ. So the question for us is how are we witnessing?

How are we witnessing to Christ? Are we giving off an aroma or a stench among the various audiences that God has placed us in front of?

I want us to notice how Paul, he notices, he recognizes that he is a witness no matter his circumstances and he doesn't sit on his hands, he doesn't wait for better life circumstances to start serving God again.

[ 29 : 43 ] In his two year stint in Caesarea when his only audience was the governor Felix, he said, all right, cool. I'm just gonna share the gospel with this one guy. This must be my calling in this season.

He doesn't try to open up, force open doors that God closed. He simply goes through the ones that God opens. Same thing here in Rome, he doesn't say, well, my hands are literally tied, these chains and this house rest are preventing the gospel from going forth.

No, he says, if I can't get out of Rome, let the people come to me. He invites the Jewish leaders in to hear what he has to say, verse 17. Just three days after he arrived in Rome.

He hardly even takes a breather after that crazy shipwreck and the snake bite and all that. In verse 30, it says he welcomed many visitors, actually. And since he couldn't go out, he just had people come to him and he continued to preach boldly, even while chained to a Roman guard under house arrest.



And history tells us that during this two year stint, what he did was he wrote the beautiful, the magnificent prison epistles. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon.

[ 30 : 53 ] See, nothing, nothing, no circumstance could keep Paul from bearing witness to Christ. To him, the gospel was too important.

It was too important to be halted by his chains and his circumstances. And God's power was, God's power to make much out of our limitations was too great for Paul to believe that his hands were ultimately tied.

After all, Paul worshipped a king who by being crucified on a Roman cross could remove the curse of the world. What circumstance was going to stop him from preaching that king?

So for Paul, every circumstance was not a hindrance but an opportunity. An opportunity to play his part in God's drama as a faithful witness of this crucified and risen king.

And that is how the gospel was able to thrive even under house rest in the heart of the Roman Empire. For while its messengers could be chained and beaten and murdered, the gospel cannot be chained.

[ 31 : 59 ] The spirit cannot be chained. And the kingdom that we proclaim, it will never stop advancing no matter how bad I am of a preacher, no matter how unfaithful we are as witnesses.

So why not join this kingdom movement by the spirit of God? Christ Church, are we waiting for better? Are we waiting maybe even for perfect circumstances before we give our lives fully to bearing witness to Christ?

Are we waiting to just check off a few more boxes on our list of things to do? Finish my degree, get that promotion, find a spouse, start a family, buy a home, conquer my anxiety, wait for the delta or lambda variants to get figured out?

Or might it be that God is calling us to bear witness in and through our very imperfect circumstances? What might that look like?

What might that look like? Not looking for things to settle down, but saying, my life and world and circumstances are far from what I'd like them to be, and yet God, the kingdom is yours.

[ 33 : 07 ] Jesus, the kingdom is yours and I'm still going to act out my role as your witness. For, you know, to wait upon better circumstances is actually to be held captive to an alternative kingdom.

That's exactly what the enemy wants. If Paul had stopped bearing witness and just waited for a better opportunity, I'm just gonna chill and watch Netflix for the next two years because I can't go out.

Even if he had never explicitly bowed down to a Roman god or a Roman emperor, it wouldn't really be that he stopped bearing witness. He would actually just have been bearing witness to the weakness of the kingdom of Christ and the supremacy of the kingdom of his captors, the kingdom that had imprisoned him.

See, that's what's at stake. We are Christ's witnesses. That is the message of the book of Acts. We are Christ's witnesses, Christ's church. So the question is, will we bow down and submit to the kingdoms of this world or will we, like Paul, will we, like Christ, insist, even chained under house arrest, even hanging crucified upon the crosses of the powers of this world, will we insist upon and bear witness with our whole lives to the greater imperishable kingdom of the crucified and risen Christ?

Will you pray with me? Lord, have mercy upon us for our inaction, our disobedient action, for the poor witness that we have been to the world concerning your kingdom, concerning your king.

[ 34 : 55 ]    God, we need you. We need your spirit to empower us to repent. We need your spirit to empower us to be that bright and shining city on a hill that we've so often failed to be.

And we have no grand illusions that we can do this on our own. So that's why we come to you. Because we want to be your witnesses. We want to be faithful witnesses, bearing witness to the most beautiful message, the greatest story ever told, the story of redemption, the story of King Jesus.

who is Lord. Lord, would you stir up our hearts with a passion for your kingdom, a zeal for the honor of the Lord Jesus.

Lord, would we encounter you in that way? And would we be glad? And would we be like that tree that is planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.

And whatever we do, may it prosper, may it flourish as we remain and abide in Christ, our King. As we seek first in the ay in the country in the universe for the honor and the all fathers and we know what so foram to to the almostspace and i would see you