Acts 28 "God’s Power and Your Freedom"

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Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0:00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?
The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless. Let's just bow our heads in prayer, please. Father, we give you thanks and praise that you have a perfect and true knowledge of each one who is standing here, and those who are watching and entering into worship online and those downstream. We thank you, Father, for your good and perfect and true knowledge of each one of us. And you know, Father, the different ways that we are bound, that we are not open, that we are hindered. You know not only those which are outside of us, but even more importantly, those internal things that make us not open and hinder us. We ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would bring your word deep into our hearts this morning, that we might live open and unhindered lives for the good of our neighbors, the good of this city, the good of this nation, and for your great glory. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated.
So I haven't done it in quite a few years. But in the past, there were a couple of times where there were a group of people in the church who'd come from other backgrounds or no particular faith background at all. And they'd been coming to the church for a while and they decided that they wanted to become Anglicans. So I ran, in both cases, two sessions for them. I think it was maybe three times, maybe two. I learned my lesson after the first one. But they were interested in becoming an Anglican. I said, well, I'll give you two evenings. We'll have, you know, an hour and a half, two hours of conversation. And I prepared a lot of stuff, you know, about the Book of Common Prayer, you know, the 39 articles, you know, our understanding of communion. Like, I prepared a whole pile of stuff.
[3:01] But once we got into the conversation, they weren't interested in hardly any of that whatsoever. In fact, they were really just interested in questions of power and authority. They were really interested as to how much power the Queen had over the Anglican Church.

They were interested in how much power the Archbishop of Canterbury had, how the Church of England controlled or didn't control us, the power of the bishop over us, how much power I had, how much power the congregation, how all those authority and power. That's what they were actually really interested in. And what they wanted to talk about. They said, yeah, yeah, yeah, we've come here enough. We understand Anglican view of communion, all that other stuff. We know the 39 articles are in there. We can read them ourselves. They were interested in this stuff. I mentioned this because, and I'm not saying this just because we happen to be in a federal election right now, where obviously questions of who's going to be in power are rife. And obviously, what's going on in the states is affecting us. And there's all sorts of interesting power questions going on in the states. But we are, as a people, as human beings, almost preoccupied with questions of power. Not so much of authority, but of power. In fact, authority is almost a lost category of thought for Canadians. And it's not just a political authority. We're very concerned about power dynamics in families, in husbands and wives, in schools and institutions. We read self-help books to maximize our own

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power. We read books to put boundaries up against other people's power over us. We are very, very concerned of questions of power.
And a thing that maybe if you're outside of the Christian faith and you happen to be listening to this for some reason, there's another sort of unspoken issue that a lot of Christians have about the whole power of God and Jesus's power over us. And I think it's a similar thing to the an unspoken problem that those who are outside of the Christian faith have with Christianity.
And that has to do with power. If I could put it one way, it would be like this. If Jesus can turn water into wine, what will he do? What will he turn me into against my will? See, because a lot of times Christians are a bit concerned. They don't want to get too close to God. Because if you get too close to God, who knows what he's going to command you to do? Who knows how he's going to change you?
And are these changes things which will hurt us, make us look ridiculous? We're a bit worried about it. And I think it's the same thing for those outside of the Christian faith. A lot of times, if we look a bit deeper, we don't want it to be true. And we don't want it to be true because, gosh, there's power and authority issues that just frighten us and challenge our sense of autonomy.
[6:00] The text that we're going to look at today, Acts 28, actually has some very, very wise and beautiful things to say about this. It puts the whole question of God's power and how human beings relate to God's power front and center as it closes the book of Acts and launches the readers, so to speak, into the rest of life. So if you take your Bibles and turn with me to Acts chapter 28, we're going to look at how the book of Acts ends. We've been preaching through the book of Acts.

So this is our final sermon on the book of Acts as part of this series. And what we're going to do, I'm just going to summarize. I'm going to come back to the story that Andrew read earlier, but just to summarize where we are. Luke is a book that was probably written somewhere between the year... Well, this book will come to an end in the spring of the year 60. That's when the last story in the book happens. You can date it because of all the references to secular history. And somewhere between that and 64, this book was written. And because in the year, either the end of 64 or the beginning of 65 was when Paul was martyred by the Emperor Nero. He wasn't crucified like Peter was. Because he was a Roman citizen, he was beheaded. And so we know that... Anyway, so the book is a... The book of Luke is... Of Acts, I mean, is written by Luke. It's an eyewitness-based history of the first 30 years, roughly, of the Jesus movement. And we've now come to the end of it. And what's just happened before this is there was a whole story of the sea, the storm, and the shipwreck. And it ends with Paul and the other people safely arriving on the seashore, the locals. And by the way, if you go back and look at it, I think it says in the English language translation, natives. The actual word in Greek is barbarians, actually. It actually says the barbarians were unusually kind to us. So the word barbarians actually in the Bible is just not normally translated that way into English. But it says the barbarians were unusually kind to us. The snake bites Paul. Paul doesn't die. They think he's a god.
Hospitality shown by the head of the island. Paul heals a whole pile of people. I mean, God heals people through Paul's prayers. They eventually make it to Italy. They walk the last 250 some odd kilometers.
And then we come to... He's in Rome. And in Rome, he firsts Paul immediately. He's put into house arrest, which is sort of a light type of arrest. But he's in house arrest. He invites the Jewish leaders to come.
[8:53] He tells them all that he's a Christian. He has nothing against the Jewish people, that he's Jewish themselves. And they all say, we're very, very curious here about this Christianity thing. Everybody speaks against it. And here's where we're going to continue then with verse 23.

Verse 23. So I've summarized those first 22 verses in chapter 28. And here's where we go, the last few verses of the book of Acts. And it goes like this. Verse 23.
That's probably once again because he's in chains. He has a soldier with them. They don't want to make their houses unclean by having a Roman soldier come in. So they go to him. It's also probably, as we're going to see in a moment, that Paul's whole attitude and heart is to welcome and show hospitality, even though he's a prisoner. Verse 23 again.
When they had appointed a day for Paul, they came to him at 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, both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. What Christians call the Old Testament, our Jewish friends call either the Torah or the Tanakh. And just sort of pause here for a

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second. It's very interesting here that Paul does three things. He expounds, he testifies, and he tries to convince. So what this means, these words are showing by expounding it means he's trying to open up everything in the Old Testament and nothing is off limits for them to ask him.
He's just, they can ask him anything. They can challenge him any type of way. And he will give reasoned arguments as to how to understand that particular text. Testify means that what he's doing is, of course, testifying, speaking, but it also has a sense of that he's solemn about it. Not that he has a long face and never cracks a joke. Not that he's not winsome, but that he says, this is of the utmost importance. Your eternal destiny hangs on these things which I'm talking to you about. And convince is exactly that. He's not trying to gaslight them. He's not trying to emotionally manipulate them or anything like that. He's using words to reason with them so that they, with their freedom and their intellect, can hear what he says. And it might be intellectual arguments. It might be aesthetic arguments.
[11:22] It might be, you know, poetic arguments. But he's trying to have them to understand the beauty and the power and the necessity of the gospel. And that's what he's doing with them. Spends a whole day doing that.

One of the things you can see as you look through the Book of Acts and how it goes from a few Christians in Jerusalem eventually going and now even getting into Rome, the capital of the empire, is that it's always spread by those categories of expounding, testifying, sharing, convincing. Never force.
There have been times in Christian history where Christians have attempted to use force. Just because you're a Christian doesn't mean you're acting Christianly. And why are those things wrong?
Why can we say that there's certain things done with how the Christian faith was brought to the Americas or certain things that were done with the Crusades? We can say it's wrong because it's not what the Bible teaches. It's not what Christ wants. This is the way to expand the Christian faith. Now, some of you might say, okay, well, George, that's okay. That's sort of interesting to hear. It's interesting to hear you acknowledge that there were some things done wrong in the past by Christians. But is that really what you're talking about with power? I don't really... No, no. The power part comes here. And if I wanted to, I could sort of... I could try to convince you without being honest about a problem. So there's a problem not obvious in English, but it's there in the original language in verse 24. And it goes like this.
[13:03] And some were convinced, okay, some were convinced by what Paul said, but others disbelieved. Now, what's the problem with that? Well, here's the problem with that. In the original language that this was written in, there's a verb tense. Sorry to be a bit nerdy. Okay, I know as soon as I say verb tense, there's a whole group of you I just put to sleep. So I don't know, maybe I should think of a joke at the end of it. But there's a verb tense that exists in Greek and Hebrew that doesn't exist in English. And that verb tense is called the divine passive. And convinced is that is in the divine passive. So what does that mean? What that means is this. The implication here with convinced is that God convinces them.

It's not purely their mind. In fact, at the end of the day, even though their mind is at work and their heart is at work and they're receptive to it, the real deep work of bringing them to faith faith is done by God, not by them. It's in the divine passive. So a bit of an image would be as if, you know, there's that whole thing from Revelation, how Jesus stands at the door and knocks.
Some of you might be familiar with this. And what it's really saying here is that even though they hear it, you want to open the door to Jesus, this is saying that at some level, it's God who works in you to actually help you to open the door. And since in the language of the Bible, it's never just that Jesus enters into you, but you also enter into Jesus. That in fact, probably the bigger image is that you first enter into Jesus and then he enters into you. There's this, in a sense, it's just like a human relationship of love, right? Where you love another person, in some ways they let you into their lives and you let them into your lives. That's what love is.
And that's a bit of an image about what it means to become a Christian, because it's a love imagery of you allowing Jesus into your life as Savior and Lord, and you enter into him. And so the image here is I open the door, but I'm frozen, and I need the Holy Spirit to actually carry me into Christ. I'm dependent upon God. So are you. You're dependent upon God's power. Now, the mystery is a bit deepened by the other half of the verse. Look at it again, verse 24.

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[15:40] And some were convinced, remember that's the divine passive, by what Paul had said, but others disbelieved. Disbelieved is a very uncommon word in English. It's rarely used anymore.

And it is literally refused to believe. So here we have part of the mystery of God's power. That God's power is needed for me to become a Christian. But at the same time, God's power, in my case, is not such that it... I mean, on one level, it overrides my will, those parts of me that don't actually want to enter into Christ. But on another hand, when we actually come into Christ, it's almost as if our eyes open up and we realize that we've done what we deeply wanted to do, and that we had to depend upon God to carry us. But on the other hand, there is a part of the human will, the most important part of human will, that can at a deep level just refuse this, that can just actually say no. And God will respect our no. Our no has integrity, even if it ends up meaning that we turn our back on being healed. We turn our back on our Creator. We turn our back in having the ends of our longings and yearnings and resting in the end of our longings and yearnings, that God will respect that powerful no. And God's power is talked about more. Look at what happens in verse 25.
And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement. The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet. I'm going to read that again, that last bit. The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet.
And then we'll read it in a moment. He quotes Isaiah chapter 6 verses 9 through 10. Now, it's a very, very interesting phrase there. It's a common phrase in the New Testament in particular.
What the Bible is saying here, what Paul is saying here is that approximately 600 years ago, Isaiah spoke to the people in front of him. He spoke to the people in front of him. Those were Isaiah's words.
[18:08] But what Paul is saying is that far more importantly, and that at the end of the day, every word that Isaiah spoke was the word the Holy Spirit wanted spoken. So the listeners could truly say it was Isaiah who spoke to us, and they could also truly say that it was the Holy Spirit who spoke to us.

And the implication here, because of the way Paul quotes it, it also means that when Paul's hearers in 60 AD were hearing the words of Isaiah, they were hearing the Holy Spirit himself speak to them in 60 AD.
And when in a minute or two I read Isaiah chapter 6 verses 9 and 10, you are hearing the Holy Spirit speak. That is part of God's power. And his speaking goes with us having the freedom to hear and to understand and to receive and to freely respond. But you see, it's more so, it's not just that there's this divine passive that God carries you and me when we come to faith.
And, you know, I'm just going to, you know, pause here. I don't know where we all are in terms of the Christian faith. I don't know where you are watching this online. And I don't know where you are watching this downstream, if there's any people. And, you know, every week there's somewhere between 50 to 75 people who end up watching either just the sermon or this. And I'm just a word to you. You know, part of the message of all of this is, listen to me, listen to my whatever I say about the reason, read the scriptures. And I would just encourage you, at the end of the day, there is a place to which reason can take you, but it can only take you so far. And you need to be born again. And I want to ask you if you're born again. And I want to just say to you that if you're not, you need to be. That at some point in time, you need to call out to God and say, God, I'm not sure if I agree with everything that George, I don't know if you're, I don't even know if I'm being foolish trying to talk like this to you. And if I'm just talking to myself and there's nobody there. But Father, if you are there, I want, I want to be born again. I want to belong to Christ. And I urge you to do that. But back to this particular text. So we have this divine passive. We have this power of God that he can cause words to be written by human beings that are actually him himself speaking to us. But the whole book of Acts is all about God working in the shadows, his strong hand of love working in the shadows to bring things about that he has designed and he wants to happen. And that his strong hand of love is working despite the fact that people get thrown in jail, despite the fact that the early Christians at first didn't want to do what God said, which was to go to Judea and to Samaria and to the ends of the earth with the gospel. And despite persecution, despite martyrdom, despite sin within the congregation, that God has the gospel go forth to more and more people. And his providence has seen that if you go back to Acts chapter 23, verse 11,
God says to Paul, you are going to go to Rome and you are going to testify to me in Rome. And even though that's approximately three years earlier from this, and even though Paul has had to go to Jerusalem and he's almost killed by a mob and there's other attacks on his life and he's in

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criminal custody and he's held back by Felix who's corrupt and wants a bribe and wants to just please the elite.
[22:10] And then he's held back by a bureaucrat who doesn't really care about justice, just wants to please the elites and make his life happy. And even though he goes on a ship and the ship gets shipwrecked and a snake bites him and all of those things, he ends up in Rome. That's God's providence. God's strong hand of love working in the shadows. That's God's power. And in this story, you see miracles and healings.

And earlier, you see demons being cast out. You see God's power at work. God's power at work. But there is, you know, one of the things which is so interesting about this text is if you go back and you read it, who is more free, Paul or Felix? Paul in chains or Felix, the corrupt governor? Who is more free, Paul or Festus, the indifferent bureaucrat? Who was more free, Agrippa married to his sister, only interested in spectacles? Who is more free? These people who look at good arguments and refuse to believe or Paul who's in chains? You see, part of the mystery of this whole text is that God made us to be free. He made you to be free. He made me to be free.
And he honors that freedom in us as creatures, even to the point of us using our freedom to wreck our lives and turn far from him. But when we come to him, his power will be at work in you and in me, whether it's slow and maybe five steps forward and four and a half steps back or whatever it is, that God's Holy Spirit will always work in the direction of you and I being healed and you and I becoming free. Not just free from, because that's how the text is going to end, free from certain fears, but free to, free to love, free to love.
There's a, well here, let's read this next text, which emphasizes this aspect of freedom, even if it's to our hurt. Look at verses 26 to 28. See, if, when you read this, you have to understand it's a text acknowledging God's respecting your freedom. It shows his longing and yearning that you would come to him so that he would turn the water of your life into this wine. That at the end of the day, after he's done this work, you'd say, gosh, I'm more free. Gosh, I'm more whole. Gosh, you know, I'm more complete. But also respecting it, even if it means that we become more dull and, and we lose the good of the intellect. Look at verse 26 to 27, 28. These are the words of Isaiah. Go to this people and say, you will indeed hear, but never understand, and you will indeed look, see, but never perceive, for this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them. Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the pagans. They will listen. It doesn't mean that Paul won't speak to Jews. Now, just sort of pause here a bit more about this whole thing of freedom. God calls us to love him freely, and freely, and freely has to mean freely. Freely can't be smuggled in with some act of the will to make us do what we actually don't want. I, when I do marriage prep with people, usually I'll get something like alpha pre-marriage to do the, like, certain, like, really important things, like how to talk about money, you know, how to have conversations with your wife, how to deal with extended family, all of that type of stuff. I'll normally go through the marriage ceremony, which talks a little bit about what marriage is, and what it isn't, but one of the things I say, when it comes time to actually do the marriage ceremony, there needs to be five sober, unstoned people in the room. In a sense,
[26:43] I'd say it doesn't matter if you have 200 guests, and all of them are blind, drunk, or stoned. There has to be five sober people in the room. Me, both of you, and if there's 200 drunk people, we'll go outside on the street and find two people over 18 who aren't drunk or stoned and bring them in to be witnesses.

Why is that? Because it's in some ways like a legal contract. If somebody said, listen, I was stoned out of my mind. I was drunk. I didn't mean those vows. I didn't intend to sign that. Well, I mean, obviously, there would be some legal complexities, and obviously, the other person would be extremely irate about that, but we all understand that it has to be freely entered into. We wouldn't, you wouldn't, and no wife would like it if three months later her husband said, you know, I never really wanted to marry you. In fact, if I hadn't been really drunk, I wouldn't have married you. That's not how you build intimacy between a husband and a wife, saying something like that. So we understand that love needs to be free. The person who's in the love relationship has to have a sense that the person chose them. They wanted out of their freedom to do that, and that's what God desires with us. He desires that free love relationship with us, and he honors our freedom even to our hurt. So you have this sense, then, that the power of God comes to us, and on one hand, it is

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completely and utterly capable of a miracle. He could, at any point in time, completely and utterly overwhelm you. God could do that. He could appear before us in such a way that we would fall on our face. In fact, it's very, very interesting. If you go back and read Isaiah chapter 6, it's one of the more, I mean, all the chapters in the Bible are interesting, but it's people forget that this 9 and 10 is the end of this other story, and it's the vision that God has of, Isaiah has a vision of God in the temple, and it almost completely devastates Isaiah, and Isaiah has to have, God sends an angel with some stones to make him clean. It's sort of a picture of the gospel coming, and so God could do something like that to make it so that we would all do it, even though we don't really want him to be God. We don't want him to be, Jesus to be our king. We don't want to be saved. He could do it, but our freedom matters, because love matters, and isn't that exactly what we human beings most want?

I mean, why is it that we are so concerned about power? We are so concerned about power because we desire to have the integrity of our freedom, but at the same time, and this is part of the dilemma for human beings in Canada right now, we are both preoccupied with power in terms of sense of freedom, but also with love, and not realizing that often the way we talk about power will make love impossible.

See, here's the thing. I was just watching an atheist debate, just part of it the other day. To become a Christian, you need to submit to Christ.

You need to submit to him and trust that he is the Savior and the Lord, that he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, that he will heal you. You need to submit to him. I need to.

[30:16] But it's not the submission of a slave to a master. It's not a submission to citizens, to an autocratic totalitarian government while guns are pointed at you. It is the submission that is needed in love.

And on one hand, they can look very similar, but everyone who submits in love knows that it's very different than submitting as a result of terror or force.

And that's the type of submission that we need towards God's power. And just in wrapping up, this fits a little bit with the...

Oh, I should just... Yeah, no, I'll tell you till now. This fits a little bit with the odd story at the beginning. If you turn back in your Bibles to Acts 28, verse 1...

Acts 28, verse 1, there's this very curious story at the beginning. And it goes like this. And after we were brought safely through, that's the storm and the shipwreck, and they all manage either by swimming or pieces of wood and other things to get to shore.

[31:27] So after we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. The native people, the barbarians, showed us unusual kindness.

For they kindled the fire and welcomed us all because it had begun to rain and was cold. When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand.

Vipers are poisonous snakes and bit them. And not only to bit them, it's stuck there. Its jaws are right there. They can all see as Paul probably went ouch and put his arm up there. And there's the viper hanging down from his arm.

And everybody sees it. When the native people, verse 4, when the barbarians saw the creature hanging from Paul's hand, they said to one another, No doubt, no doubt, this man is a murderer. Why do they think that? Well, though he has escaped from the sea, the goddess justice has not allowed him to live. They're pagans.

[32:38] They believe in gods and goddesses. And they see, gosh, he survived the storm. He survived the shipwreck. Ha! He can't escape the justice and vengeance of the gods and the goddesses.

But verse 5, Paul, however, shook off the creature into the fire. Took it off and threw it into the fire. And he suffered no harm.

They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited for a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

And the idea is they really watch him intently for quite a while. They're really looking forward to seeing him fall down and die. They really want to see the goddess justice at work. And after a while, they're disappointed.

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Then they realize the opposite extreme is actually probably a god. Now, this is really interesting. I'm just going to read this part at verse 7 just to end this bit. And then we'll go back to the end of the book. It's really amazing.
[33:39] Bible commentators will come up. Here's what it is. Now, verse 7, And it's really interesting.

They go on and talk about why it is that maybe they would have... The commentators forget what just happened in verse 6. Why did Publius entertain Paul?
Duh! If the gods show up, you entertain them. Not because Paul's a Roman citizen. I mean, Paul's a Roman citizen, but so what?
He's in chains. He's going to go to get... You know, pretend he's... The implication is he's probably guilty of something. But here's the thing. If the gods show up, you entertain them.
So how does this fit into the end of it? And I'll just very simply... In the pagan mind, anyone who could survive that storm and that shipwreck and not be bitten by a snake must be a god.
[34:47] And you need to be very careful around the gods and the goddesses. Why do you need to be careful? Because the gods and goddesses are amoral. They're peevish. They're short-tempered.

They get slighted easily. And so on one hand, if you don't welcome the god who's now come to visit you, you are definitely going to feel his wrath.
On the other hand, if you welcome him too much, you might very well feel the wrath of other gods and goddesses who get jealous of you spending so much time dealing with a god like Paul, whom they might say, because they're always jealous.
They're always fighting. They're amoral. They're immoral. They're just concerned with their own pride, their own glory, and their own vengeance. And they don't care about human beings.
Human beings are there to serve them. And they don't care about the fact that we die. And this is all part of what the beauty of the gospel is. How is it that pagans became Christians?
[35:47] It's because the beauty and the power of the gospel. Because Paul would have made known, it's not told them in the text, that he is not a god. He has come to tell them about the true and living God, the God who has created all things.

And the God who has created all things is not indifferent to human beings. He loves human beings. He is not one who just wants to see us as slaves. He wants to have us be his adopted children by grace.
He is very concerned with justice. He is very concerned with goodness. He sees that we are helpless. He is the one who has come to seek and save us. He doesn't come to seek and save us only when he's angry.
He comes to seek us to save us. And he's not peevish. He's not undone by all of these things. He sees how self-centered we are and how inhospitable we are to him and how we turn our back on him.
And his response to that is to come for us and to save us. And he does not just sort of flick away death. He enters into death. He does not just sort of survive the storm to show that he is God.
[36:53] He enters into your storm and mine to save you and me, who will be killed by the storms of our lives, who will be killed by the snakes, who will be killed by death.

And he enters into death and storms because he loves us. He enters into our death to save us. And he does not demand hospitality for us.
He is hospitable to you and me and welcomes you and me. He does not say, unless you welcome me certain way into my church, I will destroy you.
He says, Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. The true God is vastly different than the gods and goddesses of that world.
[37:58] And that's an important message for us. Look at how the book of Acts finally ends in verses 30 and 31 of chapter 28. Paul lived there two whole years in his own expense, and he welcomed all.

See? He doesn't say, Listen, you have to pay some money to come and see me. No, he says, I'm going to pay for you to come and visit me. I'm going to welcome everyone. That's part of what God's kingdom is about.

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You see, that when you become part of God's kingdom, when you're formed by the gospel, you're formed to be generous. You're formed to be hospitable. You're formed to welcome. You're formed not to say to the world, You've got to support us, but how we can support our cities and our neighbors.
And then in verse 31, Proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. With all boldness and without hindrance.
You see, why is it? And I'm sure some of you are, maybe all of you are vastly more bold than I have been throughout my life. I've had to grow into, God has started to form me to be more bold and more open and unhindered.
[39:07] But why is it that if somebody asks you, maybe on Monday morning, what you did the day before, you leave out going to church. Like, why is it that for a moment, if I come back to the coffee shop in the afternoon, and they ask me what I've been doing for the last couple of hours, why is it that for a moment I hesitate wanting to say that I'd spent time reading the Bible and praying?

Why is it that I hesitate about that? You know, there's all sorts of reasons why Paul could be told that he had to tone down what he said and not be too religious and not be too spiritual and just, you know, try to put oil on troubled waters and don't cause offense and all of that type of thing.
But Paul, in house arrest in chains, proclaims and speaks about Jesus and the kingdom of God openly and unhindered. And the fact is that we often bind ourselves.
We often pull our own punches. We hide. And the gospel here is encouraging us, the book here is encouraging us to be so gripped by the fact that God's power is at work, and it's not all about us. You know, at the end of the day, we might not be very good at convincing, but we can all pray for people that they will open their hearts to Christ. And we never know what tiny little word that we might say to another person that plants a seed in them, a seed in them, that will ultimately completely and utterly transform their life.
[40:47] It could even be something as simple as saying when somebody says, what would you do on your lunch break? And if you say, well, actually, I went and found a quiet corner and read my Bible and prayed. And they might smirk.

They might laugh at you. But that could also be that tiny little pebble in their shoe that God starts to use to work in them and to draw them to himself. See, God wants you and I to live open and free and courageous and unhindered lives.
That is his will for us. The devil and idols want to bind us. Jesus wants you and me to be free. I invite you to stand.
Father, your word, Paul said when he was writing to the Colossians, Father, that it is for freedom that you have set us free.
And it's not just, Father, for freedom from, although you want us to have freedom from, but it's also, Father, freedom to. Freedom to be open and unhindered.
[42:00] Freedom to be courageous. Freedom to be bold. Freedom to cross that room when we see the lonely or the new or those in trouble or those who are oppressed.

That we are free to cross that room. That we are free to pray and speak into that. That we are free to love and to receive love. That we are free to forgive and to receive forgiveness.
That we are freed to be reconciled and to value that. That we are freed to worship you up, to worship and to pray to you. That we are freed, Father.
That is what you desire for us. And we ask, Father, that your gospel would become more and more real to us and your word more and more free to us. That you would help us to trust that you will do miracles of transformation in our lives.
But it will be all for our good. All for our good. And all for our glory. That we should never fear, Father, getting too close to you.
[43:01] Or too open to you. And that, Father, in fact, we should say, Father, Lord Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, you know the water that is my life. I ask that you would do a mighty work within me.

And turn that water into wine. We ask all these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.

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