

Acts 28:11-30

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- [0 : 0 0] The following sermon is from Grace and Peace Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Grace and Peace is a new church that exists for the glory of God and the good of the northeast suburbs of Hamilton Place, Collegedale, and Ottawa.
- You can find help more by visiting gracepeacechurch.org. All right, so we're going to jump in and finish our walk through the book of Acts today.
- And, you know, if you've read the book of Acts before, you may have noticed that the book ends kind of abruptly. The Apostle Paul just arrives in Rome and then it ends.
- It doesn't seem to have Luke, the author, doesn't seem to tie all of the themes together. It doesn't seem to have this nice, like, and they lived happily ever after kind of ending.
- That's not how it ends. It ends more like a to be continued. My wife has been watching this crime show and, like, the end of every episode is a cliffhanger. That's kind of what this book feels like.
- [1 : 1 3] And, you know, that has actually puzzled scholars and, you know, regular Christians like me. For years. And so I want to read through to the end of the book. And then I want to tell you what I think the Lord wants us to see at the end of the book of Acts.
- So, let's read along. And it's another one of those long travel passages. Well, not that long today. And I'll make a couple of comments along the way. I did.
- The second note on a typo that I didn't notice from earlier was that we printed, we forgot to print the last verse on the one in the program.
- So, it's one of those important ones that's like the whole of the sermon. So, this was one of those major misses, like, you know, like the ball going through the goalie's legs. Like, it just shouldn't happen.
- And so, I went ahead and printed up the full passage. So, you can follow along on the insert there. All right. Starting at verse 11. Before I start, let me just say that you remember Paul had been shipwrecked on the island of Malta.
- [2 : 1 7] He was there with Luke and Aristarchus. They were under the care of a centurion named Julius. And it appears that because they got shipwrecked in, you know, probably early November, most likely, they would have stayed for the winter on Malta and stayed until probably February or March until the weather got better before they took off.
- They would have stayed at people's homes. There's a theme of hospitality that kind of runs through this passage. Paul is opening his home. People are opening their homes to Paul.
- So, that's just something I'm not going to talk about, but you can notice. All right. Starting in verse 11. After three days, he called... I'm sorry. Verse 11. After three months, we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island.
- A ship of Alexandria with the twin gods as figureheads. The twin gods, that's Castor and Pollux. It's Roman mythology. Not important. Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days.

And from there, we made a circuit and arrived at Regium. And after one day, a south wind sprang up. And on the second day, we came to Puglioli. You can forgive my, you know, Italian, terrible Italian accent.

[3 : 32] Puglioli. There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so, we came to Rome. And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and three taverns to meet us.

On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. And when we came up to Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier that guarded him. So, they crossed the rest of the Mediterranean Sea.

They went up and they touched the very tip of the boot of Italy. And then went up the coast and stopped at Puglioli. Which is actually in the port where modern day Naples is.

So, it's about 130 miles from Rome. But across the port from where they came in was the city of Pompeii. Which would be destroyed by a volcano in like 15 years from this.

So, this was a major port area. Major civilization point. And so, they, along the way, they found Christians who welcomed them in their homes.

[4 : 35] Helped them get along their way. I mean, 130 miles on these Roman roads was not an insignificant thing. And they got hosted along the way. It seems as though this group is kind of getting passed off from Christian group to Christian group.

Which is fascinating that Paul, though he had never been there. Though there had never been kind of an established church in some sense. That there were Christians that self-identified and were able to meet Paul and bring him in.

There's, you know, though they had not met him, they had some sense of gratitude for him. Because each of those people who had come to know Jesus had heard about it from somebody who had heard about it from Paul.

You know, the word of the gospel was going out. There's a commentator named Russ Ramsey and he says this. The phenomena of the gospel was such that in a divided world it made strangers into brothers and sisters.

People bound to each other in this life and in the next. It's pretty cool that there consistently is all these people at every turn. I've wondered as they went north when they finally kind of crested the hill and saw Rome.

[5 : 50] You know, it's called the Eternal City at this point. I don't know if you ever saw that scene in Gladiator where they go into Rome for the first time. It's all CGI but it's really moving. And just how Paul must have felt in that moment.

He had been a Roman citizen all his life. His world had kind of, he'd been under Roman rule all his life. But he now was a citizen of a greater city.

Rome now was not just the way that he thought about his own life. It was now the destination for where he was headed as a follower of Jesus. His mission was to Rome and he'd finally made it.

It makes you wonder all the things that he must have been feeling. He'd been at it for a long time. He was now literally at the ends of the earth or what he must have felt like it was.

Okay, let's keep going. After three days they called together the local leaders of the Jews. And when they had gathered he said to them, Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

[6 : 57] When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, though I had no charge to bring against my nation.

For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you, to speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain. And they said to him, We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken of any evil of you.

But we do desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against. Okay, it's kind of funny, actually, that the Jews in Rome had not heard anything about Paul, given how much they had fought against Paul in Judea.

But it's almost like they knew that they didn't really have a case. You know, they had these kind of trumped up, invented charges. They had witnesses that were not credible. And it's like they didn't even bother to send that case across the Mediterranean to go after Paul.

And yet, he was still in Roman custody. The case was dead, and yet he was still in custody, and it was hanging over him. Okay, let's keep going. When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodgings in greater numbers.

[8 : 21] Paul is welcoming them in. From morning till evening. Paul was not a short preacher. Should be glad that I don't go from morning till evening. 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 the prophets.

And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul made one statement.

This is it. The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet. This is what Carol read for us earlier. Go to this people and say, You will indeed hear, but never understand.

You will indeed 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 Gentiles. They will listen. He lived there two whole years.

[9 : 40] At his own expense. And welcomed all who came to him. Proclaiming the kingdom of God. And teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. With all boldness.

And without hindrance. You know, like so many places before, Paul would arrive, he'd go and he'd talk to the Jews. The Jews would end up in a fight about him.

And that is what happens here. So he quoted from Isaiah. And he said, God predicted you were not going to listen to this. So you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to go to the Gentiles.

And that's what he did. He spent two years there from his house, from house prison, under house arrest, and he proclaimed Jesus.

He taught about Jesus. And he did it. Did you catch the very last word? He did it without hindrance. Unhindered.

[10 : 36] Unhindered. That word speaks volumes to what the point of this entire book really is. You know, it's kind of tragic and ironic and funny that Paul being in jail in Rome actually thinks he is freed.

He is unencumbered. Unhindered. He is free to go do the work that he has been called to do while he is sitting in prison. For him, this represented success, not failure.

You know, that may sound funny for us because, you know, we would have thought, well, you know, being in jail, that's not exactly the best posture from which to do church planting. But for him, I mean, he had endured threats, accusations, you know, assassination attempts.

He'd endured going across the sea. He'd endured all kinds of things. And he finally got to the place where God had called him to be. And even though he was still in prison, for him, he felt completely unhindered.

Unhindered. His perspective was that he was now free. There's a beautiful irony to that. You know, from the beginning of the book of Acts, this has been a story about the unhindered movement of God's Spirit as he's working through the lives of his people in the thing that we call the church.

[12 : 02] That's the whole story of Acts. It began right there with Jesus in Acts 1, verse 8. Jesus said to the disciples as they gathered, he said, You will be my witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth.

That little phrase, You will be my witnesses. We need to hear that for ourselves. You. You. You. You. You will be my witnesses.

You will be my witnesses, Jesus says. That's the message of Acts, is that you will be unhindered to go and be the witnesses I have called you to be.

That's what Acts is all about. And that's what Paul is doing. He's so enraptured with the glory of God, like Isaiah was, standing in God's presence.

This thing that has happened to Paul has been so magnificent for him that he is willing to go literally to the ends of the earth to go and proclaim it. He's willing to endure all kinds of things to proclaim who Christ is.

[13 : 14] And we inherit that incredibly grand purpose. We are witnesses. This thing that was true of Paul has now become, well, the thing that was true of the disciples became true of Paul, has now become true of us.

We inherit that purpose, proclaiming the message of the glory of Christ. You know, when we sing these songs, it's not just for your personal benefit.

To proclaim that Jesus is the ancient of days, do you realize what you're doing? You're not just doing something that makes you feel good on the inside. I feel good. I'm like worshiping God.

That's not it at all. You are proclaiming to the entire world that the things that this world thinks are empowered are not. What we think makes this world run?

Money, business, politics, nation states, violence. None of that is enthroned above Jesus Christ Himself.

[14 : 20] It is a revolutionary thing you do every time you open your mouth in worship. You proclaim that something is true in this world that very few other people see. That Jesus is true.

And so we become witnesses. We are called to be witnesses both to ourselves, to tell the truth to ourselves, to tell the truth to our neighbors, to through the church expand the kingdom of God even as Chiron prayed about.

And as we do that, we are unhindered. That's the message of Acts. That's the message for you and for me is that we are unhindered in that.

Okay. Now that sounds nice. That sounds really great. But what does that actually look like and feel like to be unhindered in our calling as witnesses to Christ?

You know, I would doubt if I asked many of you, if I said, do you feel unhindered? You'd be like, number one, you're weird. I think I'm going to go in the other room. No, you don't feel unhindered.

[15 : 22] You feel hindered by all kinds of things, I would imagine. You feel hindered in doing whatever it is you want to do by your finances. You're hindered by your families. You know, those wonderful gifts that all of our family of origin has given us.

Hindered by your talents, your abilities. Hindered by the decisions you've made, the consequences of maybe some of your choices. Hindered by, you know, difficult relationships.

Now, I don't think what I'm preaching here is the Disney gospel. You know, the one that says, follow your dreams, you can go be anything you want. You are unhindered. That's not what I'm saying at all.

What I mean is that you are unhindered in your knowing and serving God and His kingdom. It doesn't mean you can do anything you want, but you are unhindered from pursuing God and His kingdom work through you.

Now, what we realize, though, is that there are constantly powers that are arrayed against us. Historically, we break these up into three different kinds of powers that we are constantly opposed by.

[16 : 34] The powers of the world, the powers of the flesh, and the power of the devil. And what I want to do is look at these powers, and I want you to see how Paul was unhindered by those particular three powers so that you can see how it is that you and I might be unhindered as we pursue this goal.

So we'll just do this quickly and then bring it back together. So first, Paul was unhindered by the power of the world. Where do you see the power of the world? Well, you see it in the power of Rome. Rome is the power broker in the world at this time and frankly still casts its shadow in some ways.

Paul is still moving through the slow gears of the Roman justice system. Paul lived under the reality of Rome's power every day of his life.

There is not a day that for him, Caesar was not proclaimed as Lord in whatever town he went to. Every single day, Caesar was Lord in his world.

And yet, Paul, Luke is saying on Paul's behalf that he is unhindered in his mission to witness to Christ. And so it begs the question for us, what sort of circumstances do you think might cause you to believe that the message of the gospel is hindered by our world?

[18 : 03] You know, what sort of circumstances would be in place to make you think that the message would be hindered? I mean, we've had it pretty good in the United States. We have been legally unhindered.

We have been freed to do what we want to do in the United States. But perhaps, you know, teaching biblical morality, perhaps teaching biblical justice, perhaps teaching the truth of the scriptures might get caught up in our cancel culture and might get, you know, frowned upon in particular ways.

Perhaps churches like ours would lose our tax-exempt status sometime in the future. Would that make it more difficult to do the kind of work that we are used to doing? Yeah, sure it would.

Make it way more difficult. But would we be hindered in the work of the gospel? Does the power of the world have the ability to hinder the proclamation of the gospel?

Absolutely not. And all you need to do is look at the growth of the church in places like China, in Iran, and even in a place like North Korea where the churches are growing despite the harshest and strictest persecution that the world has to offer.

[19 : 20] That's the place where it grows. We might even be able to say that if things clamp down more, it might actually promote the proclamation of the gospel.

Now, don't mishear me. We should advocate and we should vote for people who are going to pursue free speech and religious protection. We want policies and leaders that uphold that.

So don't be confused. But don't confuse friendly government policies with the unhindered nature of the gospel. The power of God transcends whatever the political situation happens to be.

Our work is unhindered by the powers of the world. That's the first thing. Unhindered by the power of the world. We're unhindered by the power of the flesh. Every time Paul went into a new city, he met with the Jews.

And every single time. Some people believed, but the majority rejected. And they ended up in a fight. The power of the flesh to reject the goodness and the glory of God, even if it is given to them, is incredible.

[20 : 30] As I was thinking about this sermon, I was thinking back to this particular group of students. I had this, I did, I worked with students for our denomination at the University of Texas in Austin back in the early 2000s.

And my first year, I had this group of girls that were all freshmen. And I loved these girls. There was like five or six of them that all came together. They were all friends and piled around together.

And of that group, I think four of the five or six of them ended up over their four years walking away from the gospel. A couple of them, one girl in particular, came from a really strong Christian family.

In fact, she was like the most kind of on-fire student I had as a freshman. And by the time she was a senior, she'd rejected the gospel. There is a power, a spiritual power of the flesh that is determined to oppose the truth of who God is.

That is always going to be there. We can't get away from it. And yet, that's why Paul quoting Isaiah is so helpful for us. Because what it says is, God knew this would happen all along.

[21 : 50] The power of rejection, it's not a surprise. You know, we're going to go, we're going to go give the gospel to as many people as we can.

You're going to get to know friends and you're going to have neighbors and you're going to invite them to be a part of this. You're going to tell them things and they may reject. And that's okay. Because the power to make them become a Christian is not yours.

It's the power of the gospel that we have through Christ. That His message is going out even in the midst of a world that is rejecting it. That's the surprising nature of our calling is we are called to go and to do the work of proclaiming even if we cannot control the fruit of what happens from that.

We're witnesses to the greatest news that the world has ever heard and yet the power of the flesh to reject it is constantly active. And yet it won't win.

It won't win. That's what the third thing is. So the power of the world, power of the flesh, power of the devil. One of the things that I am so fascinated by in this passage is the fact that Paul's story doesn't end here.

[23 : 02] You know, you kind of think that most people when they're telling the story would like take it to Paul's death because it seems like Paul has been a pre-major part of the second half of the story. Or he would, you know, Luke would go back to the beginning and kind of bring all that, you know, here's what's happening in Jerusalem right now.

But that's not what Luke does. He just ends it. And we could think that that's the end of Paul's story, but it's not. So what ends up happening in Paul's life is that he spends two years in Rome.

He ends up presenting his case before Emperor Nero. He's freed because there's really no case against him. He's freed to go. And so after those two years, what we think, we think that he sailed west and went to Spain.

Some scholars speculate he might have gone to France. Some people even say Britain. I don't think that's true. But that he went to Spain and he started churches there. And then after a time there, he ended up coming back to go visit his other churches in Greece.

So Ephesus and Thessalonica and in Athens and Corinth. And he went back to go do work there. He was freed for another about seven years. It's during that time that he wrote his letters to Timothy, his letters to Titus, his letter to the Thessalonians.

[24 : 18] We think he wrote those letters in that time period. And then after about seven, eight years, something like that, he was arrested again, sent back to Rome where he was ultimately martyred, we think beheaded, under Nero's persecution, his massive persecution against Christians.

See, I think this is fantastic. See, Luke's story ends here, but the story of the gospel doesn't end.

That's why I think this unhindered language is so provocative because it leaves it with this to be continued kind of thing. That the story is progressing and it's going along and it's continuing on in the same way that it has been going.

That all along there was opposition. You know, Satan, what we need to realize is that there is spiritual opposition at every turn.

That all the way through the book of Acts, there's spiritual opposition. It takes the form of Jewish opposition, takes the form of spiritual rejection, it takes the form of Roman difficulty, but it also takes the form of these very specific spiritual powers.

[25 : 35] Paul talks about powers and principalities being arrayed against the work of the gospel. We know theologically that Satan was defeated at the cross and yet he still has this power in the world.

He's still dangerous. You know, I never actually put it together until I was thinking about it this week. I haven't seen this movie in a while, but in Lord of the Rings, you know, Lord of the Rings, I know, not everybody is into that.

But you remember that scene where Gandalf is, they're running through the mines of Moria and Gandalf stands up and he does that thing where he throws his staff down and he's like, you shall not pass. And I'm not going to try to do that for you.

And there's this big demon thing that he's fighting. He's called a Balrog. And this Balrog is some sort of demonic thing. And the thing, the little bridge crumbles and this Balrog falls down into the abyss.

He's been defeated except he has this long tail and everything gets quiet. You think that the crisis is over and this long tail comes up and grabs Gandalf's leg and pulls him down.

[26 : 50] And I never put it together that that's a really visual image of the status of Satan. The devil has been defeated. He no longer has power in this world to determine the outcome of things and yet he remains dangerous.

And Paul battled against that and we as the inheritors of that vision continue to battle against the defeated and yet still dangerous forces of the world and the flesh and the devil.

You see, part of Luke's purpose in the whole book of Acts is to proclaim that the growth of the church was done by the work of the Holy Spirit through his people proclaiming power over all of the enemies of God and the work of the church going forward.

That's the whole point is that the church is going forward against opposition and unbelief and spiritual forces. And that's the reality that we have to live in.

That we're proclaiming a truer and a different story. That's why I want our children to know that when they say the Ancient of Days they are proclaiming that there is something true in this world.

[28 : 06] That there is a God who is true and rules over this world. Okay. What might that look like in your actual life? In real life? There is a pastor who is like me he has been planting a church outside of Nashville south of Nashville Spring Hill area his name is Mike Finema and Mike and his wife Stephanie they have four children or five children I think five children and last Thanksgiving the day after Thanksgiving he took his kids out mountain biking with another family and their kids and he was kind of the last in the group going down this trail and he hit a jump awkwardly and flipped his bike and even though he was wearing a helmet landed on his head on the helmet but landed so hard that he crushed a few vertebrae in his spine and is has it was a terrible injury he is now what is called a there is a technical term an incomplete quadriplegic what that means is he doesn't have any feeling in his legs but it's the incomplete thing

I did not know this this is a thing I'm sure you doctors can you know tell me this is exactly perfect but what it is is that his nerves are somewhat connected there's a possibility of them regrowing so he can have some his muscles will fire just barely but he can't walk he can't move his legs on his own he is he is handicapped anyway they I've known about this for a little while but they put out a video this past week he and his wife and it was amazing I'll put it on the website they were so hopeful talking about this injury you know Mike is working so hard he's you know this is seven months since the accident and he's starting to be able to like move certain muscles and things like that it's going to be a long road you know will Mike fully recover from this probably not not likely this has been a terrible blow to them

I mean relationally they're now you know it's a totally different way of them relating as husband wife as father and children it's different professionally they had to shut down their church plant he's no longer pastoring financially it's been a difficult thing there's been some problems so he doesn't get long term disability they're paying for this in other ways spiritually can you imagine what this is like absolutely this has been completely destructive of everything that they thought that their life was going to be about and yet they have hope he's a true pastor he's already trying to look for ways to minister to other disabled people that he's with it's amazing I can even imagine I can see that he could potentially in a couple of years have this wonderfully fruitful ministry when he becomes more stable Mike has this sense that in the middle of difficult life circumstances he still has a role to play in God's mission going forward it's a different mission than he originally thought but he seems unhindered even in this incredible injury see that sense of being unhindered by the realities of the world and the flesh and the devil can work itself out in our lives in very real and practical ways here's a few you are not hindered in your calling and your ability to raise up your children to be disciplined in the ways of

God to teach them to show them what it means to follow Jesus to care for them to show them what it means to be a responsible adult you are not hindered in that work you are not hindered in intentionally getting to know your neighbors in intentionally building relationships with people that are different from you you are not hindered by the world and the flesh and the devil in doing that are there difficult circumstances sure of course there are but you are not hindered in this you are not hindered in finding a role to play at grace and peace there is no hindrance to you in coming in and being a part of finding a home relationally of being known and serving and participating in what is happening here see it isn't simply you know giants like Paul or you know super special awesome

Christians that are unhindered look Jesus himself one of the ways that you can look at Jesus' entire life is that he lived a life that was unhindered unhindered by the trappings of being God himself he became man he was obedient to God the Father can you imagine what that would have been like to be obedient in every way every day to his father can you imagine how humiliating it might have felt for him as a man who knows the glories of the world of creation to be bound to these bodies that we have and yet he did it in a way that was completely and perfectly obedient he was obedient in his sacrifice unhindered in his sacrificial love for people he was unhindered even in his death you remember the first sermon of

[34 : 05] Acts in Acts chapter 2 Peter's sermon at Pentecost here's what Peter said men of Israel hear these words Jesus of Nazareth a man attested to you by God mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst as you yourselves know this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men God raised him up losing the pangs of death here's why because it was not possible for him to be held by them it was not possible for Jesus to be hindered even by the cords of death and as Christians we are united to the risen and reigning savior of this world because Jesus reigns and you are united to him that means you are unhindered by the difficulties and the frustrations and the opposition and all of the things about you and your life that don't work and are that you think are making it difficult for you to pursue the Lord you are not hindered you are not hindered you are freed to go and to serve and to be the one that

God has called you to be and to serve him in the way that God has called you to serve and here's the deal if you don't know how you are called to serve him here it is right here we need you we can't do this work without you there may be small ways maybe big ways maybe ways you don't even know about all you gotta do is ask see that's what we should be doing as the church is constantly reminding one another that we are not hindered you may feel so weak so insecure you know some of you may have been really hurt in churches they may have not cared well for you I'm sorry for that I'm not trying to minimize the challenges that you face every one of us faces those challenges what I want you to be reminded of and to be confident in is that the power of the risen Christ in your midst is far greater than any of the challenges that you face you can take that to the bank he is greater he the one who is in you is greater than the one that is in the world than the one that is in your mind than the one that is in that we see all the time so we have to gather together to remind one another of what's true and we have to keep proclaiming the glory of Christ you know that's what we're doing here we're not just giving each other stuff to do we're proclaiming the glory of Jesus we are unhindered the story to be continued this is why we joined the Acts 29 network or one of the reasons we just finished

Acts 28 they've named themselves the Acts 29 network because we need to be united with other people who believe that there is a fundamental continuity from Jesus standing on this earth telling his disciples that they will be witnesses all the way through to Paul going and planting churches in Greece and implanting churches in Rome and who knows where else to the early church to the reformation to the church here to what will become the church in Africa and in Latin America and the church in China and the church that will far surpass any of our expectations there is one continuity in all of that we have one role to play we live in an Acts 29 world isn't that exciting isn't it amazing that we get to be a part of what God was doing there we get to be a part of that now it's amazing I want you to be a part of that I want you to get excited I want you to see your life as unhindered wouldn't it be amazing if that was the thing that bound us together okay let's stop let me pray father help us to live lives that are unhindered you've shown us the way would you give us the power to do that by your

Holy Spirit we ask in Christ name amen and you you