

The Gospel Unhindered

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Preacher: Ricky Njoto

[0 : 0 0] Well, keep your bubbles open to that page as we finish our series through the book of Acts. Well, I wonder if you've read a book or seen a movie where you get very invested in a character in the story, and then the story ends, but it doesn't tell you what happens to that character.

And you're like, wait, that's it? What happens to him or her? And then you realize that, as you think about it, that perhaps the point of the story is not about that character at all.

I wonder if you've experienced that. Well, I think that's what often happens when we read the ending of the book of Acts. We've been following Paul's missionary journeys through ups and downs, through his being beaten up, captured, falsely accused, shipwrecked, bitten by a snake, and now we're at the end of the story, and then we might ask, wait, that's it?

What happens to Paul? Does he get an audience with Caesar or not? Does he get to evangelize Caesar or not? But there's no hint of what happens with Paul here after being detained in Rome.

What's going on? Well, I think the ending of Acts reminds us that the story is not about Paul at all. It's about the spread of the gospel of Christ through his church to the ends of the world.

[1 : 3 6] And that's why the story ends with Paul preaching the gospel in Rome, which was the center of the world back then. And so the ending passage here repeats and highlights the important points of the gospel, which was the point of the book of Acts.

And we will see three points, that the gospel is the hope of Israel, and eventually it's also the hope of the whole world. And the gospel is about the kingdom of God, and that the gospel is of Jesus Christ the King.

So let's go through the story to see these three important points of the gospel. Well, from last week in verse 16, we read that Paul reached Rome, and then he did not wait long to ask to meet with the Jewish leaders in Rome.

So in verse 17 to 20, three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them, My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people, or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans.

The Romans examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. The Jews objected, and so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar.

[3 : 0 8] I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people, and 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.

And so Paul explained that the purpose of the meeting was for Paul to clarify that his visit to Rome was not because he was guilty.

In fact, the Romans thought that he was innocent. They wanted to release him. And he wanted to see Caesar, not because he wanted to bring charges against the Jews.

In fact, it's because Paul was with the Jews that he was arrested. It was not a foreign idea that he was proclaiming. He was proclaiming the hope of Israel.

What is this hope of Israel? Well, we'll come back to that point, because Paul's point is not finished here. We will see it later.

[4 : 13] And then in verse 21 to 22, the Jewish leaders reply, 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, because we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect called Christianity.

Now, it's quite strange that the Jewish leaders in Rome did not hear anything bad about Paul. Perhaps the Jerusalem Jews had decided to drop their attempt at persecuting Paul.

We don't know. But in any case, the Jewish leaders in Rome wanted to hear more from Paul, because even though they had not heard anything bad about Paul, they had heard bad things about Christianity.

And now, Paul got an opportunity again to talk about the gospel. And so he did. In verse 23, They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying.

[5 : 29] 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.

From morning till evening for the whole day, Paul explained to them two things, the kingdom of God and about Jesus.

These are two central points of the gospel. And so as we end the book of Acts, it's good to remind ourselves of the central points of the gospel.

So let's dig deep into these two points. And then we'll combine them with the hope of Israel that we talked about earlier.

And together we can see the big view of the gospel that Paul was trying to explain to the Jews here. So first point, the kingdom of God.

[6 : 30] In Acts and in the Bible as a whole, the kingdom of God is sort of a shorthand way of describing God's perfect rule of his people, defeating sin and death and, all power of darkness.

What does that look like? Well, Isaiah 11 gives us a little bit of a glimpse of how that looks like. In Isaiah 11, we read, he, that is the king or the Christ or the Messiah, will not judge by what he sees with his eyes or decide by what he hears with his ears, but with righteousness, he will judge the needy with justness.

He will give decisions for the poor of the earth. In other words, there will be perfect justice and equality, even for the lowest of the society.

And then, in that kingdom, the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together, and a little child will lead them.

The cow will feed with the bear, the young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.

[7 : 59] In the kingdom of God, with God's perfect king and Messiah ruling over it, there is perfect justice, equality, peace, love, and harmony.

And, it's eternal, as our Old Testament passage in Daniel says, when the Messiah was given authority, glory, and sovereign power, all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him, his dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away.

So, the kingdom of God is one that is characterized by eternal peace, eternal justice, eternal love, eternal harmony. And then, the second point, is Jesus.

The second point that, that Paul was trying to explain to the Jews, about Jesus. Most likely that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the king that was prophesied, by, the Old Testament passages, that we just looked at.

Jesus is the king of the kingdom of God. The implication is that, the kingdom of God is already here, because Jesus has come. And, people need to follow him, as the king.

[9 : 21] Well, how do we know that the kingdom of God is here, and that Jesus is the king? This is where the hope of Israel, comes into play. So, let's go back to that point.

What's the hope of Israel? Well, Paul already said, to the governor of Felix, in Acts 24, he said, I have the same hope, as these men, that is, these Jews have, that there will be a resurrection, of both, the righteous, and the wicked.

The hope of Israel, is the hope of, resurrection, eternal life. Israel has been hoping for this, based on Old Testament passages, like Ezekiel 37, or Daniel 12.

And, Paul is saying that, it's fulfilled. That hope, is fulfilled, and it's already here, because Jesus, the king, has been resurrected.

Eternal life, has come. That's how we know, that Jesus is the king, of the eternal kingdom of God, because he, is eternal. His reason, from the dead.

[10 : 28] And so, combine those, three points together, and we get, a big picture, of the gospel, the good news, that, the kingdom of God, is characterized, by, perfect peace, love, harmony, justice, and eternal life.

That king Jesus, has brought, that kingdom of God, here, through his resurrection. And therefore, the hope, of the resurrection, the hope for eternal life, and eternal peace, and love, and justice, is already fulfilled, in Jesus.

It's available, here, now, and we can enjoy it, in Jesus. That's, the good news. Paul took, Paul took the whole day, from morning, till evening, to explain that, to the Jews, from the Old Testament.

But, these days, people won't allow you, to have that time, right? What is the gospel? You can't have, morning, till evening, to explain that, to people. So, we need to be succinct, in our gospel presentation.

How do we do that? Well, here is, one example, one way, of sharing the gospel, succinctly, by evangelist, Glenn Scrivner.

[11 : 51] In the beginning, there was light, and life, and love. There was a father, loving his son, in the joy of the Holy Spirit, and everything has come, from light, and life, and love. And out of this, has come a world, that is destined to share, in light, and life, and love.

But you know, that this world, is not like that. I know this world, is not like that. I look around, and I see darkness, and death, and disconnection. Where's that come from? Well, we've turned from the light, and when you turn from the light, where else do you go, but darkness?

And when you turn from love, where else do you go, but death? So this is the kind of world, we live in. But what does love do, when love sees the beloved, in trouble?

Love says, your pit will be my pit, your plight will be my plight, your debts will be my debts, your darkness will be my darkness, your death, will be my death. So who is Jesus? Jesus is love come down, the son of the father, comes, and becomes our brother, to be with us, in the darkness, to take that darkness, on himself, on the cross, to take that disconnection, on himself, even to take that death, that we all deserve, for turning from God, took that on himself, on the cross, plunged it down, into the hell that it deserves, and he rose up again, to light, and life, and love, and he says, you in the darkness, do you want my light?

You in death, do you want my life? You in disconnection, do you want my love? And anyone who simply says, yes to Jesus, we get Jesus in our life, we get his father, as our father, we get his spirit, as our spirit, we get his future, as our future, it's for free, and it's forever, so do you want Jesus?

[13 : 25] That was called, the gospel in 90 seconds, exactly, did you notice, how, Glenn, incorporated, the three core ideas, that Paul is talking about, in this passage, even if he uses, different words, there's the, kingdom of perfect love, life, and light, there's, Jesus the king, and then there's, the resurrection, those are the cores, of the gospel, but just like, Glenn doesn't, use Paul's words, you don't have to use, Glenn's words, to explain the gospel, and you can think about, your own way, of sharing the gospel, to the people around you, so, Paul explained, that gospel, to the Jews, and how did they, react, in verse 24, to 28, 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, and 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, Paul quoted, what God had said, to Isaiah, that the people, did not want to believe, because their hearts, had become, calloused, hardened, humility, and repentance, were required, for the people, to submit, to Jesus the King, but their proud, and hardened hearts, did not allow them, to repent, and submit, that's the, the core of sin, isn't it, hardened hearts, because we, want to be the kings, instead, the rebellion, however, was not, unexpected, and God, used it, to bring the gospel, to the Gentiles, everyone else, us, now, why should, everyone else, be interested, in hearing, about the gospel, well, because this hope, of resurrection, is also, the hope, that every human, being has, it's not only, the hope, of Israel, we all long, for that perfect, eternal country, don't we, that's why, none of us, can ever be, truly satisfied, with the present world, there's a hole, in our hearts, we always expect, something more, something else, peace, what are, the big problems, of the world, today, some people, are looking, for peace, and harmony, either, global, peace, and harmony, because they're, tired, of hearing, about conflicts, and wars, everywhere, or, just, peace, and harmony, with the people, around them, some people, are looking, for that, just a few days ago,

Kai, my son, was being, very naughty, and rebellious, and eventually, he made me, very angry, so I took some time, to calm myself down, and then I saw my wife, Hannah, talking to Kai, and afterwards, he approached me, slowly, and then he showed, this expression, of regret, and then he climbed, onto the couch, and hugged me, really tightly, for two, to three minutes, and he said, almost in a whisper, sorry daddy, and as I was, hugging him, you know that, warm feeling, of being in peace, with someone, that you love, that warm feeling, of loving, and being loved, and I thought, wouldn't it be nice, if this happened, every day, well, the kingdom of Jesus, is characterized, by perfect peace, and love, and harmony, and it lasts forever, love, and peace, and harmony, there don't end, no conflict, no wars, that's what everyone, wants, isn't it, it's not only, the hope of Israel, everyone, wants that, some other people, fight for, justice, and equality, but they never, find perfect justice, and equality, because the world, is still full of sin, and justice ends, because the world, is not, eternal, the kingdom, of Jesus, on the other hand, is characterized, by perfect justice, because sin, has been defeated, by the king, and the justice, lasts, because the kingdom, is eternal, some people, simply look for, meaning, in life, but real meaning, is not found, in temporary things, because if we put, meaning, in temporary things, life becomes, meaningless, when those things, end, or die, meaning, is found, in eternal things, and the kingdom, of Jesus, is eternal, because the king, has risen, from the dead, and lives forever, and those, who follow him, will live forever, and our love, for each other, in that kingdom, will last forever, and everything, that we work for, and we achieve, in Jesus, for that kingdom, will last forever, that's a meaningful life, and so, do you believe, in Jesus, do you follow Jesus, if you haven't, made a decision, yet,

I encourage you, to do so, don't harden your hearts, like the Jews, in this passage, follow Jesus, join the kingdom, and eternity, is yours, and if you have, believed, and followed Jesus, do participate, in the spread, of the gospel, because your family, and your friends, need to hear, about the good news, of the eternal, kingdom, of Jesus, as well, the book of Acts, ends with, verse 30 to 31, 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, the two repeated points, there, with all boldness, and without, hindrance, at first, it seems quite ironic, that it ends, with the words,

Paul proclaimed, the kingdom, without hindrance, and yet, we know, that he's still, under house arrest, he's still not free, to go wherever, he'd like to proclaim, the gospel, isn't that a hindrance, well again, when we remember, that it's not about, Paul, but it's about, the spread, of the gospel, we realize, that even when, Paul is facing, a hindrance, physically, the gospel, that he carries, is not, theologian, CK Barrett says, preachers, may be persecuted, imprisoned, even killed, but the word, of God, is not bound, that's what, without hindrance, means, it's not about, Paul, it's about, the gospel, and that opens, the story, to our participation, because we too, ought to participate, in the proclamation, of the gospel, through talking, about Jesus, with the people, around us, we should participate, in, inviting our friends, and family members, to, to the meet Jesus services, for them to meet Jesus, as well, we too, should participate, in the story, and continue, the book, through, chapter 20, 29, 30, 31, until Jesus returns, and even though, sharing Jesus, is scary,

[22 : 21] I'm scared, when I, when I, share Jesus, to the people, around me, we might face, rejection, persecution, and in some places, we might face death, but Jesus, the king, of the whole world, is with us, he has promised, he has said, I will be with you, and he's the one, who's going to make sure, that the work, of his gospel, is unhindered, and unchained, as George Whitefield says, we are immortal, until our work, on earth, is done, so let's, spread, the gospel, with boldness, with courage, knowing that Jesus, is with us, let's pray, Lord, thank you, for the gospel, thank you, that you've sent, your son Jesus, to be the king, of kings, so that in him, we can join, your kingdom, and participate, in eternal life, in the hope, of the resurrection, help us, to share this gospel, to the people around us, in Jesus, our king, we pray, amen.