

The Gospel Unhindered

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[0 : 00] Please turn your Bibles back to Acts 28 as we finish our series through the book of Acts. I wonder if you've read a book or seen a movie where you get very invested into a character and then the story ends, but it doesn't tell you what happens to that character that you're invested in and you're like, wait, that's it? What happens to him or her? And then you realize 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. Someone from this church came to me last week and asked, what happens to Paul?

Now, we've been following Paul's missionary journeys through ups and downs, through his being beaten up, captured, falsely accused, shipwrecked, beaten by a snake. And now we're at the end of the story and we might be asking, wait, that's it? What happens to Paul? Does he get an audience with Caesar? Does he get to evangelize Caesar or not? But there's no hint of what happens with Paul here after being detained in Rome. Now, I think the ending of Acts reminds us that the story in the book of Acts 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.

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 this ending passage here repeats and highlights the important points of the gospel.

that the gospel, that the gospel, we will see three points, that the gospel is the hope of Israel and eventually also the hope of the world, that 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. In verse 16 from last week, we read that Paul reached Rome, and then he did not wait for long to meet up, to ask to meet with the Jewish leaders in Rome. So 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. They, the Romans, examined me and wanted to release me because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death.

[3 : 21] 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. 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, 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 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.

You see, it was not a foreign idea that he was proclaiming. He was proclaiming the hope of Israel. The gospel is the hope of Israel. So what is this hope of Israel? We'll come back to that point a bit later because Paul's point is not finished here. It's not complete. We will see that later.

And so in verse 21 to 22, the Jewish leaders replied, the Jewish leaders 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, the Christianity. Now, it's quite strange that the Jewish leaders in Rome did not hear anything bad about Paul. Perhaps the Jerusalem Jews had dropped their attempt at persecuting Paul.

We don't know. In any case, the Jewish leaders in Rome wanted to hear more from Paul because they had heard things, they had heard bad things about this sect called Christianity. And now Paul

got an opportunity to talk about the gospel again. 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. 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. So from morning till evening for the whole day, Paul explained to them two things, the kingdom of God and about Jesus. Now, these are two central points of the gospel. So we'll dig deep into these two points and then we'll combine them with the hope of Israel mentioned previously. Because as we end the book of Acts, it's good to remind ourselves what the central points of the gospel are.

[6 : 44] So, first one is the kingdom of God. 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 over his people, defeating sin and death and all power of darkness. What does that look like? Well, in Isaiah 11, we were given a glimpse, a little bit of glimpse of how, what that looks like. In Isaiah 11, he, that is the king, the Messiah, the Christ, 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 justice, 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 a 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 vipers' nest. In the kingdom of God, with God's perfect king 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, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. So the kingdom of God is one that is characterized by eternal peace, eternal justice, eternal love, harmony.

And the second point is Jesus. Second point that Paul was trying to explain to the Jews. Jesus, most likely that Jesus is the Christ. He's the king of the kingdom. He's the king predicted in the Old Testament passages that we just looked at. The implication is that the kingdom of God is already here because Jesus has come and people need to follow him as the king.

Now, 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 is the hope of Israel? Well, Paul already said to the governor Felix in Acts 24, he said, I have the same hope in God as this man, these Jews themselves 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.

[10 : 35] Israel has been hoping for this based on Old Testament passages like Ezekiel 37, Daniel 12, and Paul is saying that the fulfillment of the king of the eternal kingdom of God because he's risen from the dead and he lives forever.

And so combine those three points together and we get the big picture of the gospel that Paul was probably trying to explain to the Jews.

We get the good news that the kingdom of God is characterized by perfect peace, love, harmony, justice, and eternal life. King Jesus has brought that kingdom of God here through his resurrection. And therefore, the hope of the resurrection, the hope of eternal life and eternal peace and love and justice is already fulfilled in Jesus. It's here and we can enjoy it if we follow Jesus the king.

That's the big picture of the gospel. Now, Paul took the whole day from morning until night to explain that to the Jews.

[12 : 07] But these days, people won't allow you to have that time from morning till evening. Hey, explain to me the gospel. No, you can't take morning till evening. 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.

Let's watch. 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 disconnection? When you turn from life, where else do you go but death?

[13:05] 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.

Jesus 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.

[14:04] So do you want Jesus? Yes, that was called the gospel in 90 seconds. Exactly. Now, did you notice how Glenn incorporated the three core ideas that Paul was trying to convey to the Jews, even if he uses different words?

There's the kingdom of perfect love and life and light. There's Jesus, the king. And 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 with the people that you know. So Paul explained the gospel to the Jews. 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.

[15:27] 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.

Paul quoted what God had said to the prophet 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 before Jesus the King, but their proud and hardened hearts did not allow them to repent and submit.

That's the core of sin, isn't it? Wanting to be like God, wanting to be the King, and therefore we don't want to submit to the King. Their rebellion, however, was not unexpected.

[16:37] And God used it to bring the gospel to the Gentiles, that's us, everyone else. 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. 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 always that hole in our hearts. For we long for something more, for something else.

What are the big problems in the world today? Some people are looking for peace and harmony. Either global peace and harmony, because they're sick and tired of hearing wars and conflicts in the global scale.

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.

[17:53] Well, he's two, so that explains it. And eventually, he made me very, very angry. So, I took some time to calm myself down.

Then, I saw my wife, Hannah, talking to Kai. And afterwards, he approached me slowly. And then, he showed this expression of regret on his face, which I had never seen in him before.

He's a cheeky, cheeky, stubborn little boy. So, he showed that expression. And he climbed onto the couch and hugged me really tightly for two to three whole minutes.

And 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 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.

[19 : 08] 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 just the Jews. It's not just the hope of Israel. This is the hope of the whole world. Some other people fight for justice and equality.

But they never find perfect justice and equality. Because this 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.

[20 : 18] Meaning is found in eternal things. Meaning is found in eternal things. And the kingdom of Jesus is eternal. Because he's risen from the dead and he 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 the kingdom will last forever.

That's a meaningful life if you ask me. And so do you believe? Do you follow Jesus?

If you haven't made a decision yet, I would encourage you to do so. Don't harden your hearts like the Jews in this passage did.

Follow Jesus. Join the kingdom. And eternity is yours in him. And if you have believed and followed Jesus, do participate in the spread of the gospel.

[21 : 23] 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 and 31.

It says, 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 points that are repeated here. 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 the story is not about Paul, but about the spread of the gospel, we realize that even when Paul is facing a physical hindrance, the gospel that he carries is not.

Theologian C.K. Barrett says, Preachers may be persecuted, imprisoned, even killed, but the word of God is not bound.

[22 : 52] That's what without hindrance means. It's not about Paul. It's about the gospel. And that opens the story to our participation. We too ought to participate in the proclamation of the gospel through talking about Jesus with the people around us.

Or invite them to the meet Jesus services. We too should participate in praying for gospel workers. We too should participate in the story and continue the book, the story in the book, through chapter 29, 30, 31, until Jesus returns. And even though sharing Jesus is scary, it is scary.

I get scared when I share Jesus with the people around me. And we might face rejection, persecution, and in some places we might face death.

But Jesus the King is with us. He has promised, 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.

[24 : 09] As George Whitefield says, We are immortal until our work on earth is done. So let's be courageous and be bold in sharing the gospel with the people around 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 of kings, we pray. Amen.