

Text: Acts 28.30-31

This is our last message in the book of Acts, number 288.

We began on January 17, 2016, with some interruptions, we end on October 2, 2022. The interruptions extended us by about a year, if we hadn't missed a Sunday, we would have finished over a year ago.

I was just checking my records... this isn't my longest series, but it is number 2 to my 318 messages in Romans.

Enough about statistics!

What is it that the Lord has for us in the last two verses of Acts 28?

Ac 28.30-31 And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him,³¹ preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

Don't you think this is a curious ending for all that has gone before?

I think Luke clearly knew the outcome of Paul's trial before Nero. Paul's arrival in Rome was likely the early months of AD 60, the time marker here puts us into the year AD 62. The great fire of Rome did not occur until July 18, AD 64. After that point, Nero turned against the Christians.

Tradition (and some hints in other Bible books) says that Paul was released from prison by Nero but was later imprisoned again (after AD 64). Some think he accomplished his goal of traveling to Spain. We have no record of that. Certainly he spent some time in the western part of Greece, according to Titus 3.12:

Tit 3.12 ¶ When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there.

"Nicopolis ... or Actia Nicopolis was the capital city of the Roman province of Epirus Vetus. It was located in the western part of the modern state of Greece."¹

¹ "Nicopolis," in *Wikipedia*, June 21, 2022,

<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Nicopolis&oldid=1094268826>.

So, that brings us back to the question, why does Luke end Acts as he does?

- We have the record of his arrest in Jerusalem (Ac 21.27-22.30)
- We have the hearing before the Sanhedrin (Ac 23.1-10)
- We have details about Paul's transfer to Caesarea (Ac 23.11-35)
- We have details about the hearing before Felix (Ac 24.1-27)
- We have details about the hearings before Festus and Agrippa (Ac 25.1-26.32)
- We have the long laborious details of getting to Rome (Ac 27.1-28.16 — 60 verses!)

And then Luke wraps up and says nothing about Nero.

F. F. Bruce suggests that Luke's readers well knew the outcome and didn't need any information about it. Then he concludes,

“...in any case, Luke has attained his object in writing when he depicts Paul preaching the gospel without hindrance in Rome over an extended period of time.”²

Notice that line: “preaching the gospel without hindrance”

Notice the last word in Acts 28.31: “unhindered”

That gives us the title for our message and points the direction to what Luke is saying to us.

Proposition: The gospel can suffer many attempts to silence it, conscious and unconscious, but the message proceeds in the power of God, unhindered.

I. The substance of the gospel message

A. The relative freedom of this imprisonment enabled continued preaching

1. Paul not housed in prison, but in a rented house (presumably own expense)
2. Paul able to welcome all who came to him (plus the Roman guards)
3. Period was extensive: two whole years

² Bruce, *Acts*, 510.

One can only imagine the effect this freedom had among the many who came to hear him (compare his stays in Corinth or Ephesus, Acts 18, 19)

B. The summation of Paul's message

preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ

1. Compare the statement we saw last week as Paul preached to the large group of Jews

solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets (Acts 28.23)

2. Studying the themes

- a. The Kingdom of God creates a kind of inclusio for Acts (perhaps part of Luke's plan)

Ac 1.3 To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a *period of forty days* and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.

See also

Ac 1.6 ¶ So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"

And now...

Ac 28.31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

b. Kingdom preaching through Acts:

Ac 8:12 But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.

Ac 14:22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

Ac 19:8 ¶ And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading *them* about the kingdom of God.

Ac 20:25 “And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face.

Ac 28:23 ¶ When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening.

Ac 28:31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

c. The theme of Jesus Christ

Ac 4:2 being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

Ac 4:18 And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

Ac 5.42, 8.12, 8.35, 9.20, 10.36, 11.20, 17.3, 18, 18.25, 19.13

Ac 28.23 ¶ When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening.

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There may be more passages than these, but these certainly reflect the big themes of apostolic preaching.

C. The gospel message: teaching what the kingdom of Jesus Christ means

1. Jesus is the king to whom all men are accountable
2. If you face Jesus in the judgement, your sins will condemn you
3. Repentance and faith in Christ will gain the gift of redemption
4. Redemption puts you in the kingdom, to live with Christ forever

II. Reflection on efforts to hinder the gospel message

- A. The Sanhedrin forbade preaching in this name: Peter immediately announced their prohibition would not work
- B. The Sanhedrin imprisoned and abused the apostles, the preaching persisted anyway
- C. Paul pursued Christians from house to house and all the way to Damascus: the gospel overcame even his violent resistance
- D. The Sanhedrin and many Jews conspired to suppress the gospel by assassinating the preachers (Paul escaping Damascus and Jerusalem, James, Peter on death row)
- E. Antagonistic Jews stirred up riots and antagonism in Roman cities (Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, Ephesus)

F. The Jews and the rulers arrested and imprisoned Paul in Jerusalem

- Prohibition
- Abuse
- Murder and attempted murder
- Civil disturbance
- Arrest and imprisonment

Nothing stopped the gospel: Unhindered

III. Remembrance of the ongoing unhindered power of the gospel message

- A. Nero tried to blame the fire of Rome on the Christians: many died at his hands
- B. Domitian and others oppressed and suppressed Christianity as it grew in the Roman empire: under Constantine, the norm turned upside down
- C. The rising political church through the middle ages gained great power, corrupting the gospel and confusing truth with superstition: pockets of believers keep the gospel flame alive
- D. The shackles of the corrupt central church broken as Reformers courageously began to rediscover the gospel
- E. The revival churches and Christians of the world-wide missionary era broke the stranglehold state churches tried to impose on the gospel

Ac 28.31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

Conclusion:

Proposition: The gospel can suffer many attempts to silence it, conscious and unconscious, but the message proceeds in the power of God, unhindered.

You and I are evidence that the unhindered message traveled across land and sea to arrive in our hearts in Victoria, BC, today. We are ten hours from Jerusalem, almost half-way around the world. The gospel came to us.

What are we going to do with the gospel?