

The Gospel Unchained

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[0 : 0 0] Well, please keep your Bibles open 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 in a character and then the story ends but it doesn't tell you what happens to that character and you're like, wait, 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 after all. 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 be asking, wait, that's it? What happens to Paul? Does he get an audience with Caesar or not?

Does he get to evangelize to Caesar or not? But there's no hint of what happens with Paul here after being detained in Rome. Well, I think the ending of Acts reminds us that the story is not about Paul at all.

[1 : 2 7] It's about the spread of the gospel of Christ through his church to the ends of the earth. 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 as we read this passage, it's good for us to realize the point of the passage, and that is the gospel.

Because this passage here repeats and highlights the important points of the gospel. And we will see three points. That the gospel is the hope of Israel, and eventually also the hope of the whole world.

That the gospel is about the kingdom of God. And third, that the gospel is of Jesus the King. And 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 for long to ask to meet with the Jewish leaders in Rome.

[2 : 4 2] So we read in verse 17 to 20, 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 examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. 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.

So Paul explains here that the purpose of the meeting that he wanted to hold was to clarify that his visit to Rome was not because he was guilty.

[3 : 48] 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 is 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 a bit later, because Paul's point is not finished here.

It's not complete. So we continue reading in verse 21 to 22. The Jews 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 called Christianity. Now, it's quite strange that the Jewish leaders in Rome did not hear anything bad about Paul.

[5 : 01] Perhaps the Jerusalem Jews decided to drop their attempt at persecuting Paul. We don't know.

But in any case, the Jewish leaders wanted to hear more from Paul, because even though they had not heard anything bad about Paul per se, they had certainly heard something bad about Christianity.

And so, 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.

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.

[6 : 12] And so, as we end the book of Acts, I think it's a good time for us to remind ourselves of the central points of the gospel. And so, we'll dig deep into these two points, the kingdom of God and Jesus, and then we'll combine them with the hope of Israel mentioned previously.

And together, we will see a big view of the gospel that Paul was trying to explain to the Jews. So, first one, the kingdom of God.

What is the kingdom of God? Well, 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, Isaiah 11, in the Old Testament, gives us just a little bit of a glimpse of that. It says, he, that is the king, or the Christ, 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 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.

[7 : 45] 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 the 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.

In the kingdom of God, with God's perfect king ruling over it, there is perfect justice, equality, peace, love, 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 so, the kingdom of God is one that is characterized by eternal peace, eternal justice, eternal love, and harmony. That's the first point.

[9 : 06] The second point is Jesus. The second point that Paul was trying to get across to the Jews. Most likely that Jesus is the Christ.

Jesus is the Messiah. He's the king of the kingdom of God. He's the king prophesied and expected by the passages that we just looked at in the Old Testament.

And 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? Well, this is where the hope of Israel comes into play. So, let's go back to that point. Sorry.

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

[10 : 16] The hope of Israel is the hope of resurrection, eternal life. Israel has been hoping for this based on passages like Ezekiel 37 or Daniel 12.

And Paul is saying that the fulfillment of that hope is here, 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's risen from the dead. And so, combine those three points together and we get the big picture of the gospel, the good news, that the kingdom of God is characterized by perfect peace, perfect love, harmony, justice, and eternal life.

King Jesus has brought that kingdom of God here through his resurrection, 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. It's available for us now. We can enjoy it in Jesus. That's the good news. That's the gospel. Paul took the whole day from morning until evening to explain that to the Jews from the Old Testament.

[11 : 41] But these days, people won't allow you to have that time, right? Tell me about the gospel. You don't have morning until evening. You have what? Two minutes. So, we need to be succinct in our gospel presentation.

How do we do that? Well, here's 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?

[12 : 43] 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? It's called the gospel in 90 seconds and he did it in 90 seconds.

[13 : 49] In the beginning, no, that would be 91 seconds then. Did you notice how Glenn incorporated the three core ideas presented here by Paul?

Even if he uses different words. There's the kingdom of perfect love and life and light. There's Jesus the king. There's the resurrection. These are the core ideas of the gospel.

But just like Glenn doesn't use Paul's words, you don't have to use Glenn's words, light and life and love.

And you can think about your own way of sharing the gospel to the people around you. So Paul explained the gospel to the Jews and how did they react in verse 24.

Verse 24. 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.

[15 : 02] 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, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn and I would heal them. This is Paul saying, Therefore, I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles and they will listen.

So 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?

[16 : 11] We want to be like God. We want to be the kings. We don't want to submit to the real king. Their rebellion, however, was not unexpected and God used it to bring the gospel to the Gentiles which are everyone else, us included.

Now, why should everyone else be interested in hearing about the gospel, especially if the gospel is about the kingdom of God, according to the Jews, the hope of Israel?

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. We always look for something more, something else.

what are the big problems of the world today? Some people are looking for peace and harmony, either global peace and harmony because they are sick and tired of hearing about wars and conflicts in a global scale, or just peace and harmony with the people around them.

[17 : 38] Some people are looking for that. just a few days ago, Kai, my son, was being very naughty. Not this guy. This guy is a good boy.

Kai, my son, was being very naughty and rebellious. I mean, he's two, so there's that. 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. He's like, he's two years old. So he's, he approached me very slowly and then he showed this expression of regret, which I had never seen in Kai before because he's a very cheeky boy.

He showed me this expression of regret and he climbed onto the couch and hugged me really tightly for like two, three whole minutes and said, almost in a whisper, sorry, daddy.

And as I was hugging him, right, you know that warm feeling of being in peace with someone that you love? That warm feeling of loving and being loved?

[18 : 55] 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 between each other.

And it lasts forever. Love and peace and harmony there don't end. No conflicts, no wars. That's what everyone wants, isn't it?

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 the world is still full of sin and justice ends because the world is not eternal.

The kingdom of God, the kingdom of Jesus is characterized by perfect justice because sin has been defeated by the king there. 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 : 22] 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 sake of the kingdom will last forever.

That's a meaningful life if you ask me. So if you haven't believed, do you believe in Jesus? Do you follow Jesus? If you haven't made a decision yet, I'd 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.

And if you have believed and followed Jesus, do participate in the spread of the gospel. Your family and friends also 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. For two whole years, Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him.

[21 : 48] 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, it's about the spread of the gospel, then we realize that even when Paul is facing a physical hindrance, the gospel that he carries is not.

People keep coming to Paul even though Paul can't go to them. theologian C.K. 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. We, too, ought to participate in the proclamation of the gospel through talking about Jesus to the people around us.

[23 : 13] Invite them to the meet Jesus thing. Join the Kingdom Growth Night and pray for the spread of the gospel. Pray for your friends there.

We, too, should participate in the story and continue the story in the book through chapter 29, 30, 31, 32, until Jesus returns.

And even though sharing Jesus is scary, I get scared when I share Jesus with the people around me. And we might face rejection or persecution in some cases, 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.

As George Whitefield said, we are immortal until our work on earth is done. So let's participate in the work of the gospel boldly, courageously, having faith that Jesus is the one who keeps his gospel alive.

[24 : 33] 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 with the people around us courageously. In the name of Jesus our Christ we pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.