

# Gospel Unstoppable

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] But we're going to turn now to our Bibles, and we have plenty of visitor Bibles at the side here at the back, so do please grab a Bible if you don't have one with you. And we're dipping in this morning to the end of the book of Acts.

That's a one-off. Acts 28, page 937, if you have one of the visitor Bibles. Acts 28, and we're picking up the reading at the end of verse 14.

So we're finishing off Acts, and the previous chapters have charted Paul's various trials before different authorities.

He's been imprisoned, and he has sought appeal to Caesar. He's gone to the highest level in his legal proceedings, and he is traveling to Rome for his final appearing before Caesar.

And this is the end of the book of Acts, and Paul has been making his way to Rome. And we see in Acts 28, verse 14, that he arrives in Rome.

[ 1 : 1 5 ] So we pick it up there, end of verse 14. 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 into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier that guarded him.

After three days, he 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.

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 and 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 any evil about you.

[ 2 : 4 1 ] But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect, we know that everything, everywhere, it is spoken against. When they had appointed a day for him to come, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers.

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 from the prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved.

And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement. The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers, through Isaiah the prophet, 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.

[ 4 : 01 ] He lived there two whole years 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.

Amen. May God bless his word to us this morning. May God bless his word to us this morning.

I want you to think about that. At the end of it all, when it comes to the end, when the eulogy is read at your funeral, what will be said about your life?

As Christians, the deepest desire of our hearts is to pursue the purposes of the Lord Jesus Christ.

it ought not to be ourselves at the center but the Lord Jesus at the center of the story of our lives he should be the one taking center stage at the end of it all you see the Bible transforms our thinking it turns things on its head and rather than ourselves being at the center it's the Lord Jesus who's at the center the Bible transforms our self-centeredness with Christ-centeredness now we've jumped to the very end of the book of Acts here at the end of Luke's account and it's all been building to this ultimate conclusion and at first glance it seems like a bit of an anti-climax as we read it through our sort of man-centered lens you perhaps expect a nice neat conclusion which brings everything to a nice neat summing up particularly with questions that have been unresolved what happens to Peter who dominates the first part of Acts what happens ultimately to Paul who dominates the end of the book many of our questions are left unresolved and that can be a bit unsatisfying from one perspective but you see our questions and the answers that we want are not the questions that Luke is answering we will see the conclusion as unsatisfying if we fail to grasp Luke's whole purpose in writing his is not a book about Paul it is not a book about Peter or about any human character rather

[ 7 : 12 ] Acts is a book about the Lord Jesus Christ it is about what he began to do in Luke's gospel about his life and death and resurrection but it's also about what the Lord Jesus continues to do through the book of Acts it is not primarily a book about human activity but rather it's about the activity of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ at work by his spirit through his people people like Peter people like Paul and so for Luke to leave things unresolved from a human perspective to leave things about Paul unrecorded unresolved that's not a problem because Luke was not writing a biography about Paul his purpose the whole reason he wrote this book is for people like you and I Christians to have certainty about the ongoing work of the Lord Jesus Christ and given that that is his purpose given his conclusion rather than being an anti-climax his conclusion is absolutely in line with his purposes and actually it's a challenge to any self-centered thinking in our own hearts because the hearer of the story here is the Lord Jesus and the hearer of the story of our lives the one at the very center ought to be the Lord Jesus not ourselves and what Luke is doing is he brings this book to a conclusion he is showing us so clearly that the Lord Jesus is keeping his word he is keeping his promises his gospel message is going just as he promised to the very ends of the earth and there is nothing there is absolutely nothing in the world that can stop it nothing can stop the progress of the gospel that life changing message about the Lord Jesus nothing will stop it and the final sentence of the whole book is key isn't it?

look again at verse 13-31 this is the key message Paul lived in Rome for two whole years 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 the proclamation of the gospel against all the odds just reread the previous chapters and see what happens to Paul against all the odds the gospel is advancing and that as Christ's people that fact should thrill our hearts to see that the life changing gospel is going to the ends of the earth and nothing will stop it you see Paul Paul has made it to Rome against all the odds at the very epicenter of the known world the very center of political and economic power Paul is there proclaiming the gospel of Christ without hindrance and so Luke as he brings his book to a conclusion he wants all of us to come away from this chapter he wants us to come away from this book clear and certain and confident in the unstoppable progress of the word of the Lord Jesus Christ the gospel it's unstoppable that's the thing we need to grasp this morning we'll look at this final few verses in three sections look at first verses 14 15 and 16 and we see Paul getting to Rome and what we see here in these few verses is that the promises of God he always keeps them and we also see the real encouragement of fellow Christians now these three verses are very encouraging for two reasons one

Paul actually makes it to Rome now from a human perspective that seemed like a pretty unlikely outcome at various points as you flick over the previous chapters you see that Paul is under arrest he's going from court to court he's going from legal proceeding to legal proceeding he is not a free man he can't just decide to get up and go to Rome that's not within his power to do it he's under arrest however he eventually appeals to Caesar in this legal process and so begins the journey to Rome but he endures the most terrifying of sea voyages you can read about that in chapter 27 he's shipwrecked and not only that he lands he manages to get onto this dry land he gets bitten by a snake and yet at the end of verse 14 Luke is able to tell us and so we came to Rome

Paul made it that had been his goal for so long right the way back in chapter 19 of Luke of Acts Paul has set his sights on Rome obstacle after obstacle has stood in his way trial after trial years in prison he's faced down very real threats to his life and yet through all of that the Lord has kept and guarded him Jesus has kept the promises for 23 verse 11 where he promised Paul that he would testify in Rome and here he is at last in the very centre of the most powerful empire in the world he's due to appear before Caesar himself to testify to the Lord Jesus the most powerful man in the known world Paul's going to go and see him and Luke is showing us that nothing is going to stop the advance the spread of the gospel nothing is going to stop the gospel going to the very ends of the earth just as Jesus said in Acts chapter 1 verse 8 and now that real gospel witness will take place with God's messenger in Rome well the gospel is really going to spread from there all the roads heading out from Rome to the rest of the known worlds this is why we're here today

Paul taking the gospel to Rome then exploding across the Roman Empire that's why we are here in Glasgow 2,000 years later God's gospel is unstoppable human opposition can't prevent it from spreading not even the elements not storms not snakes nothing can stop the march of gospel witness to the ends of the earth and this fact that Paul made it that must encourage us as we read these words it's not that we won't encounter struggles or opposition Acts very clearly teaches us that all the way along there is opposition to the gospel every turn but even when we do face difficulties things that perplex us suffering we can know with absolute certainty that nothing is going to stand in the way of the gospel advancing in the world you shall have tribulation said Jesus Christ to his disciples but he went on but be of good cheer for I have overcome the world yes there will be suffering but in the end you will see that I have overcome in the face of all the things he had to face of all the tribulations and struggles

[ 15 : 09 ] Paul made it he got to Rome that's the first encouragement here God keeps his promises Paul made it to Rome just as he said he would the second encouragement here is the very real and personal encouragement of the Christian brothers who greeted Paul look at verse 15 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 now perhaps your geography of ancient Rome isn't too hot but these two places mentioned here are not outside Rome they're not close they didn't just pop down the road to kind of have a chat with Paul no the forum of Appius was about 65 kilometers away and the place three taverns about 50 kilometers away it's quite a long way particularly when there's no cars you've got to walk presumably they heard that Paul's on the way and they came to meet him on his way into Rome and they accompanied him on that final leg of the journey and what a kindness this is from the Lord for Paul this has been a long term goal to get to Rome it's been so costly for him and to be welcomed by Christian brothers on the road into Rome what an encouragement that was to him and these were people very likely he received and read over his letter some three years earlier what we now call the letter to the Romans they probably read that what a massive encouragement for Paul to see these dear brothers just think about the joy that you experience when you see relatives family after a long journey it's been a long time but you see them there in the airport arrivals or the bus stop or the train station it's encouraging us isn't it when we see people after so long how much more so for Paul after all those years of hardship near death shipwrecks not only has he reached Rome but he's been greeted by brothers in the faith he's greeted by the living evidence of his own ministry this is the fruit of the gospel he's been proclaiming people that he's labored never seen before but there they are the fruit of his ministry people willing to walk 65 kilometers to meet him now I suspect that many of us will be prepared to go a long way to greet those who first introduced us to the Lord Jesus think about the person who first spoke to you about Jesus how far would you go to greet them after a long arduous journey

I think we'd go some distance wouldn't we when we remember what we have in the Lord Jesus how much that means to us how thankful we are to those who've gone before us and shared with us the hope of the gospel and their effort here communicates love a very real tangible partnership a flesh and blood greeting how meaningful that is quite right that Paul should thank God look at verse 16 he thanks God or sorry end of verse 15 he thanks God and took courage and we do the same don't we when we're encouraged by our brothers and sisters in Christ when we've been through a tough time and a brother comes alongside encourages us the Lord was clearly at work already in the city that Paul was going to he had long planned to go and how kind are the Lord to prepare these people to come and greet Paul as he arrives the Lord does keep his promises but he also brings real encouragement in flesh and blood ways for his people for his servants and we do the same through our flesh and blood presence we give real courage to one another as we gather here each Sunday as we meet in small groups for the week as we show hospitality in our homes as we give somebody a phone call or a whatsapp message to encourage them to strengthen them how we need that doesn't that bring you great courage encouragement when you're going through a tough time all of these things are so crucial as we gather together don't undervalue the essential part that you and I play for each other in strengthening bringing courage we need it all the time so Paul is greatly encouraged here as he arrives into Rome but following that there's a pretty healthy dose of reality look on to verse 17 to 27 we see here a real dose of reality the gathering of the Jews and what we see here in these verses is the sober reality of the hardened privileged that's what

Paul encounters after getting settled into his accommodation Paul seems to have been under some sort of house arrest you'll see end of verse 16 that he was able to stay by himself with one guard and he was able to host guests it seems to earn some sort of living but he was under house arrest and after he settled he summons the local Jewish leaders verse 17 and there are two gatherings the first in verses 17 to 22 and then the second from verse 23 and the first meeting is fairly unproblematic he's able to share with them something of his own story and especially the past couple of years of his life during which he's been under arrest and in the eyes of the Romans without a case to answer actually the Jews who've been opposing Paul and that is why he's called together this gathering he wants to make a defense and share with them the very heart of his message look at verse 20 for this reason therefore I ask to speak to you since it's because of the hope of Israel that I'm wearing this chain now the hope of Israel this was the messianic hope the hope for the coming of the Messiah for the establishment of the Messiah age when evil will be defeated when justice will be secured and peace forever could be enjoyed and in the Old Testament scriptures this hope of restoration for God's people this fulfillment of all God's promises is presented as nothing less than the resurrection from the dead listen to Isaiah 25 he will swallow up death forever and the Lord will wipe away tears from all faces

Isaiah 26 your dead shall live their bodies shall arise you who dwell in the dust awake and sing for joy it is a resurrection that is bodily that is clearly God's doing and that will happen with the dawning of a new age with the inauguration and fulfillment of all God's promises that is just what Luke records Jesus teaching his disciples what happened at the end of the gospel age Luke writes these are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you that everything written about me and the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures and said to them thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and the repentance of the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem see the resurrection is the very heart of the hope of Israel the hope of the scriptures and with the resurrection of Jesus we see the beginning of fulfillment of all the wonderful promises of the scriptures it is this hope that Paul says has now been fulfilled he claims that it has been fulfilled and made available through Jesus' resurrection from the dead that is Paul's witness it is because of this hope that Paul says he's in chains he's testifying to the resurrection of Jesus that is why he's in chains well this certainly piques the interest of the Jewish leaders verse 22 they say they want to hear more from Paul they've heard about the sect as they call it in verse 22 and it's this second meeting recorded from verse 23 that things become explosive and it's here in the second meeting that the hearts of these Jewish folk in Rome their hearts are really exposed it's here that the sober reality of the hardened privileged is seen for what it really is their true colors come out

Paul as he's done so wherever he's been teaches from the scriptures look at verse 23 from morning till evening he expounded to them testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Lord Moses and from the prophets he was reading from Isaiah as I've just done showing how the promises of this savior this messiah were fulfilled in the Lord Jesus he's the one we've been waiting for he is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament scriptures Jesus Christ is the one you've been waiting for he's appealing to these Jewish leaders these are men who knew inside and out the Old Testament and Paul is telling them that the thing you're waiting for has happened the one you've been waiting for has come the long promised messiah has come and he's risen from the dead that's Paul's message verse 24 some were convinced some believed they heard what Paul was saying yes

[ 25 : 39 ] Jesus is the Christ he's the one but others disbelieved end of verse 24 and that is nothing new that response that Paul gets here with these Jewish leaders in Rome that's nothing new same message same response all the way through Acts some gladly receive others reject see Paul's great goal first articulated in chapter 19 to get to Rome that would not prove to be some sort of evangelistic utopia where everybody would respond and believe where everyone would believe and repent no Rome would be just like every other city he's been to some would repent and believe some would but others would reject and by including this sobering reality in this penultimate paragraph

Luke is reminding us again of the reality of gospel witness the fundamentals are unchanging the message remains the same the responses remain the same there are only two responses as the gospel is proclaimed as the mess about Jesus the one who died who rose again as that message is proclaimed there are two responses belief or rejection acceptance or unbelief we will always get both that was how the Lord Jesus found it the apostle Paul the great Paul that was the response he got it's the same for every believer down through the ages there will always be both and that will as I'm sure come as no surprise to you we like

Paul minister to a hardened people for Paul it was those of the great privilege of being recipients of the old covenants people of God the Jews they had the scriptures they knew them inside out they had known for centuries more than any other people group the word of God great promises made to them they more than anybody else should have responded with joy to Paul's message they should have gladly accepted it but they didn't for us we live in a society that has for many centuries known the blessing of being taught the word of God having it shape how we live shaping the common values we share it underpins so much of what we have in our society we have a rich rich heritage to live in a western society is to live in a society saturated by Christian concepts and assumptions somebody wrote

I didn't have the quote down I don't know who said it but that is our experience in this world in our western society we are underpinned by Christian values we have that great privilege and yet what's that led to what do we observe in our society what does that privilege produce well if you're like me and you look out in our city and our society it's a hardening hasn't it a hardening to the gospel and that's a sober reality but Luke here is equipping us to expect it to be prepared for it to fall on our knees in prayer for those around us in the city who are hardened we just need to be real this is always the case this sort of hardening we will always see so don't be surprised but we're not without hope because there are those who will receive the message with joy and that is the note that Luke concludes on verses 28 to the end our third point gospeling the

Gentiles we see the unstoppable progress of the gospel to the ends of the earth Paul's concluding words to the Jewish leaders would have struck them like a hammer look at verse 28 this is his parting blow to these Jewish leaders therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles they will listen Jesus was to be the savior not only of the Jewish people but the whole world the ends of the earth has always been the goal from the very beginning of the bible the globe has been the goal listen to Simeon's song in Jerusalem's temple record all the way back in Luke chapter 2 as he meets the child Jesus here's what he says he says my eyes have seen your salvation that you prepared in the presence of all peoples a light for revelation to the

[ 31 : 04 ] Gentiles and for glory to the people of Israel see Simeon knew didn't he that the coming of the Lord Jesus into the world was not just good news for the people of Israel it was good news for the whole world you see the God of the bible is the God of the whole world not just a small slice of it and so God's salvation his gospel is for the whole world and Jesus himself is explicit isn't he the beginning of Acts as he commands his followers that they be his witnesses not only in Israel but beyond that into Samaria and to the very ends of the earth and that is what has unfolded before our eyes as we read through the book of Acts that gospel exploding from Jerusalem and going to the ends of the earth now the book of Acts is quite a short book but it covers 30 years of history but 30 years was all the time it took for the gospel to spread from Jerusalem to Rome renewing the face of the ancient world transforming the world and in the 2000 years since the gospel has gone to the very end of the earth unstoppable we would not be here otherwise and that is why this ending is so appropriate and fitting for Luke's purposes it is a gospel for all the nations verse 28 and it's a message that cannot be stopped verses 30 and 31 we finish this book of Acts we leave the apostle

Paul in the midst of ongoing ministry the same work that he's been committed to do all the way through namely proclaiming and teaching about Jesus that's what he's doing and that work continues with all boldness and without hindrance we're told and with that Luke closes his history this is where it ends for Luke it was never meant to be a complete record of the rise and progress of Christianity but it was meant to be a representative account of what Christianity was and what the risen Lord Jesus began and continued to do but as one writer put it the point at which Luke laid down his pen Paul though in chains and the gospel of God's kingly rule were irrepressibly surging ahead without let up or hindrance in spite of human opposition in spite of nature's storms the gospel advancing that's where we leave the book see Paul may be under God and chain but the gospel isn't how could it be the gospel is the message of the forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life from the sovereign

Lord of the universe this is God's message to his world it cannot be stopped it cannot be contained God's gospel will be threatened yes God's people will suffer yes but the gospel itself will never be silenced it will continue to grow and go to the ends of the earth until Christ returns see Jesus is the king of the universe he will be glorified today and tomorrow as men and women boys and girls all across the globe turn in repentance and faith Jesus is the king of the universe he will be glorified today and tomorrow as men and women boys and girls across our city turn in repentance and faith and follow him Jesus is the king of the universe he will be glorified today and tomorrow as men and women boys and girls in our church repent and follow the Lord

Jesus his gospel is unstoppable nothing nothing will stop us so friends be encouraged with these final words from the book of Acts we are part of the only institution in this world that will last into eternity the church gathered will last forever and we're part of it God is building his church and he uses people like you and me to proclaim the very message that builds his church that should thrill our hearts that we get to be part of that the story of Acts ends not with Paul as the focus but the Lord Jesus and his gospel that's the focus and so we must ask ourselves is the gospel story is the

Lord Jesus what he is doing in his world is that at the very center of the story of our lives does that take center stage you see our lives aren't really about our personal ambitions and dreams are they they ought not to be our lives are about something far greater far more significant something far more enduring than our own dreams and goals our lives are about the kingdom of God about men and women boys and girls coming and following the Lord Jesus Christ knowing forgiveness and eternal life and we get to be part of that yes evangelism is hard telling others about the Lord Jesus is hard we get hit with rejection over and over that's not a sign of failure that's how it is it was for Paul for Jesus for Peter for every Christian there will always be rejection but at the same time there will be glad acceptance there will be people who do hear that message and follow the Lord

[ 37 : 23 ] Jesus the ultimate reality the biggest story is the gospel will advance evangelism is worth it because eternity is coming and some will respond some will repent it is worth it it's worth it it's worth it remember the trajectory of history the gospel unstoppable let your life be about that let me pray as we close heavenly father give us a vision of eternity please lift our eyes above the daily concerns which so often cause us great anxiety the daily troubles that occupy our minds keep us awake at night lord above all these things remind us of ultimate realities remind us of the reality of heaven and of hell remind us of the great hope of the gospel of the lord jesus christ which is life for all who will believe so father please reorientate our lives and our hearts so that the very center would be your concerns your plans your priorities encourage our hearts that the gospel is unstoppable lord help us to believe help us to trust you help us to follow the lord jesus and to be a people that live not by what we see but to live by faith help us we ask in jesus name amen you

Thank you.