

The Unhindered Gospel

Introduction

- Alright, pull up a piece of grass. Find a spot on a rock. We are out of our usual building. This isn't your average Sunday morning service. We're outside, a stone's throw from the river, and we have kids running around, food cooking, and we have people here who have never stepped foot inside a church building before. **This is a Good day.**
 - If you are new with us this morning, let me tell you a bit about who we are. We are Celebration Church, and we believe that following Jesus should not be boring. If following Jesus is boring, you are doing it wrong. In fact, we think that having a relationship with the living God is the single most exciting thing you can do. And so, we gather every week to celebrate all that God is doing in and through us to build His kingdom.
 - **We take our faith seriously, We don't play church.** Every week we go as deep as possible into God's word so that we can actually grow. I can't tell you how many people have come to me over the years, totally stagnant. And longing to go deeper in their walk with Jesus. Celebration Church is built to help you do exactly that.
 - **Worship** - We sing theology
 - **Small Groups** - Relational Discipleship / Community
 - **Discipleship** - D1, D2, D3
 - **Leadership Training** - Pastoral Institute/ Women's Institute. Here at Celebration Church, we have the ability to take you from pagan to pastor. Discipleship is what we do.
 - But I think one of our most defining characteristics is that we **preach Expository Sermons**. We go through the word of God chapter by chapter, verse by verse.
- How many of you have ever struggled to finish a book? We here at Celebration Church finish our books!
 - **Acts 63rd sermon** - ~1,007 verses and approximately 23,495 words. First sermon was almost exactly 2 years ago on September 24th 2023, **Jonah - 4** sermons, **Daniel - 13** sermons, **Galatians - 14** sermons, **Ephesians - 15** sermons, **Ezra and Nehemiah - 25** sermons, **Luke** holds the current record with **73** sermons.
- This week we finish the book of Acts.
 - The book of Acts, this epic story of God's mission, its like the princess bride, its got everything, shipwrecks and riots and assassination attempts, starts with the Holy Spirit coming down like a wildfire and it ends with the Apostle Paul under house arrest, his trial unresolved.
 - **Some might think that It feels like a story cut short, a biography that just fizzles out. No closure, no conclusion just kind of stops in the middle.** That is because Acts doesn't end with Paul's death. It doesn't tell us what happens with his trial. It ends with him under house arrest, "proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance"
 - Luke, the author, deliberately chooses to leave the story unfinished.

- **Why?** Because the story of the Acts of the Apostles is now the story of the Acts of the people of God. The story transitions from a historical record of a few men to an open ended invitation to each of us to participate in the next chapter.
 - **WE ARE THE NEXT CHAPTER IN THE BOOK OF ACTS**

Acts 28:30-31

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.

Context/Story

- one of Paul's most productive seasons. While physically restrained, his ministry expanded through the written word. It was during these two years that he authored the letters to the *Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*.
 - These are called the "Prison Epistles", are they are filled with theological depth and exhortations to joy, unity, and perseverance. Paul is encouraging the global church to continue on in the face of opposition.
- It was a bold and dangerous thing to proclaim Jesus in the capital of the Roman Empire, because it announced a better kingdom, and a greater king whose authority transcended that of Caesar and the Roman state.
 - This arrangement reveals a remarkable instance of Roman legal tolerance toward the Christian movement. And that enabled it to spread to the ends of the empire.
 - There are abundant references from early church history that tell us what happened after Acts concludes. Paul came before Caesar and had his trial. He was exonerated and set free. He then resumed his missionary travels for two or three more years. We are told that he traveled to Crete, Miletus, Spain.
 - But a few years from now, Paul would be back in a Roman prison. It is at this time that Nero would begin his brutal persecution of the early church.
 - You see, In July 64 A.D., a massive fire started in shops near the Circus Maximus and burned for six days, followed by another three days of burning after it reignited. It left much of Rome devastated and several thousand homeless.
 - Rumors circulated that Nero himself was responsible for the fire, because he wanted to clear space to build his new palace, the Domus Aurea. So to divert suspicion from himself, Nero blamed the christians, and began persecuting them heavily.
 - **You never know when the winds of culture are going to blow favorably or unfavorably upon christians.** In the last few weeks we are seeing a massive revival and return to the church. Circumstances in our culture like the assassination of Charlie Kirk are driving thousands of people back to Jesus.

- **Many of you are a part of that.** You have a desire to get right with God, to return as a society to the Lord. We have seen the darkness of this world, we have seen what it gets us, and we have had enough.

Without Hindrance

- **The first point is a paradox.** Here you have Paul, physically in chains, stuck in a rented apartment, under guard, in Rome for two years, and the Bible says he did his ministry "with all boldness and without hindrance".
 - **no earthly authority**—not Caesar, not the Roman state, not Jewish opposition—had the ability to stop the Christian message. **The man is bound, but the message is unbound. The messenger is shackled, but the mission is not.**
- And that mission, the unhindered march of the gospel, is **not dependent on a few superstar preachers**. God is using Paul, in his house, to **raise up thousands of ordinary people**, filled with the Holy Spirit, and sending them out.
 - **God used Stephen**, (who was not a disciple), to be the spark that ignited the global mission. **He used Paul** (not one of the 12 disciples) as a catalyst for missions, And **He wants to use you and I**, despite our hindrances, despite our chains just like He used them.
- Prove
 - 2 Timothy 2:8-9 - Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, 9 for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!
 - Philippians 1:12-14 - I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. 14 And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.
- **What happens when we are hindered? What happens when we are silenced? What happens when we are imprisoned, or assassinated, or attacked?**
 - Now, I'm not going to stand up here and pretend that I've never felt chained. **We all have our own chains.** Maybe it's a **job you hate**. Maybe it's a **financial burden**. Maybe it's a **difficult family situation**. Maybe it's a health issue. Each of these might feel like a prison.
 - But despite your hindrances, God wants to bring you to himself. And then he wants you to join Him in a story bigger than yourself.

The End that Begins

- Many readers, both in antiquity and today, have **found the ending of Acts to be abrupt**, leaving Paul's ultimate fate—whether he was acquitted or martyred—unresolved. He ends the story of Paul's ministry because his real subject was never Paul. **The true protagonist of the book of Acts is not a human character; it is the divine Word of God.**

- Luke's purpose was not to write a biography of Paul but to tell the story of the Gospel's spread from Jerusalem to Rome, as **prophesied in Acts 1:8**.
- The Gospel was unhindered by persecution and Jewish opposition in the Apostolic Age. Then it was unhindered by distance and hundreds of different cultures in the early church.
 - Church tradition tells us that the apostle Thomas traveled to India, Thaddeus and Bartholomew to Armenia, and Mark to Egypt. Think of St. Patrick who went as a missionary to Ireland. Or Boniface, who ministered to the Germanic tribes. We have Adoniram Judson who gave the last 37 years of his life to mission work in Burma. Or William Carey, who served in India for 41 years.
 - Every single one of these guys were just like you are now. Hungry to do great things for God. Some of you may go to the ends of the earth, others of you, he may want to stay. But I guarantee you, **GOD IS CALLING YOU TO SOMETHING**.
 - Remember how I said following Jesus should never be boring? **Christianity only becomes boring when you are disobedient to do what God is calling you to do.**
- Now **some of you here don't know Jesus**. You feel the tug on your heart, but you **don't know how to say yes**. Let me help walk you through it. Repentance, Belief, Submission.
 - **Repentance** - Following Jesus starts with repentance. Big word, but it just means that you see your flaws, your failures, you sin. You see the ways that your wickedness has destroyed you and separated you from God. Repentance is turning away from all that. Rejecting all that. And turning to Jesus.
 - When Jesus died on that cross, **you were on His mind**. He lived the sinless life you could not live. And He laid down his life to pay for your sins. This is why Isaiah 53:5 says, "it is by His wounds we are healed"
 - **Belief** - The Bible says that you must believe in Jesus. That means more than just a mental agreement. It means that you put your faith, your trust in him.
 - Like a parachute, once you leave that plane, your total trust is in that parachute. You don't go back into the plane. It's ride or die with Jesus.
 - **Submission** - This means that **Jesus is Lord, not you**. You are now a servant to the King of Kings. When **He says Go**, you Go. When **He says speak**, you speak. When **He says work**, you work.
 - Jesus is now in charge. Not you. Not your spouse or your boss. Jesus calls the shots. **And the Bible is no longer a suggestion, but a command**. You live in submission and obedience to God.
 - **The Pearl of Great Price**
 - Let the end of your old life be the beginning of a new one.

Join the Mission

- **God's mission is unstoppable**. Persecution couldn't stop it. **The Jews** couldn't stop it. **The Roman Empire** couldn't stop it. **The Dark Ages** couldn't stop it. And a generation of self-absorbed, screen-addicted, directionless young men and women—

can't stop it either. The Gospel will not be contained. The mission continues, and we are called to join it.

- God's mission is not dependent on a specific building... or a platform, or a pulpit. You don't need to be a professional, and you don't need thousands of instagram followers. God's mission can flourish in any place where faithful believers are willing to bear witness to the truth.
- **A Job Description for Every Believer**
 - Acts 28:30-31 provides a concise job description for every follower of Christ. It consists of three core tasks:
 - **Welcome All:** Paul's ministry began with an open door. He "welcomed all that came to him," and this is what we're trying to do today. This is why the food is free. This is why the bouncy house is ...bouncy. We're trying to be a church that "receives all who come to us" without prejudice, without the cultural filters that turn away those who don't look like us or act like us.
 - **Your job is to make your life a place of welcome.**
 - **Proclaim the Kingdom:** The Kingdom of God doesn't spread in the abstract. It spreads through personal, individual faithfulness. It spreads through conversations around the dinner table with family, and around the water cooler at work, it spreads through neighborhoods and airports and parks.
 - **The gospel needs to leave the walls of the church building if it is ever to have an impact on this world!** Now don't mishear me, the building is where we gather to be taught, and encouraged and strengthened. But we do all that, so that we would be sent out to evangelize, to baptize, and to make disciples. This isn't just a place where you show up on Sunday to feel good. The church is a training ground for spiritual warfare. The Church is where you get ready to BE the next chapter of Acts.
 - **Make Disciples** The mission is not finished with a single proclamation; it requires detailed instruction and discipleship about the person, life, death, and resurrection of Christ. **We are not here to make converts, we are here to make disciples.**
 - Once you become a christian, you need to learn how to follow Jesus more closely. It isn't easy. It takes work. And it takes training. That is where Celebration church comes in.
 - We can help you grow, to learn, to be discipled. But even if it is not Celebration Church, that is okay. Our heart is for you to get connected with a HEALTHY church. Don't waste your time on unhealthy churches. (if you need to know more about what a healthy church looks like, come find me after service) You need to be in a place where you can grow and be equipped.

Conclusion

- Paul's life tells us that God's mission doesn't need a grand cathedral. It doesn't require a perfectly polished public platform. It needs a faithful person in a rented room, a faithful person in a cubicle, a faithful person at a kitchen table, and a faithful person in a park next to a river on a Sunday morning. The baton has been passed to us. What part are you going to play?
 - The path of least resistance will never lead to the greatest glory. So stop looking for comfort. Stop looking for a smooth path. Find your mission, link arms with your brothers, and get to work for the Kingdom.

Pray/Invitation