

The End of an Era

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Date: 05 October 2025

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[0 : 00] Good morning, brothers and sisters. It's great to be with you. And friends as well. Let's turn to Acts chapter 28. And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier who 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 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. But we desire to hear from you what your views are. For with regard to this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against. When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers.

[1 : 45] 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, and 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. As 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. 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.

Well friends, we began this series in the book of Acts, on the 17th of February, 2019. So six years later, and 37 sermons later, if you include this one, we finally made it to the end.

[3 : 06] Who's been here the whole time? A few of us. Yeah. And so we've come to the end of an era. And I for one, am really going to miss this extraordinary book.

As we move on to others, that I'm sure will be equally wonderful. But I'm going to miss the book of Acts, because for many of the last six years, the book of Acts has encouraged us to lift our vision to the ends of the earth.

As I recall it, I think I suggested that we should study the book of Acts, all those years ago, because I knew that it would fill us with courage, and confidence to take the gospel with us, wherever you might go during the week.

I hoped it would remind us to keep spreading the gospel. That spreading the gospel is really the most important thing that's happening in the world in these last days.

You know, there's a reason that the book of Acts isn't about the spread of democracy, or even, you know, health care reforms, or it isn't even about the spread of Christian values.

[4 : 12] It's about the spread of the gospel, the momentous good news that Jesus reigns, that he is Lord, because that is the most important thing that's happening in the world today.

And it's a bold, optimistic, exciting book about the spread of the gospel. And that's why I hope you've been uplifted by it each year as we've poured through its pages.

But as we come to the end of this series, I wonder what you make of the end of the book. Because it's sort of a strange ending, isn't it? I mean, maybe the first thing you notice is that we're not told anything about Paul's trial in Rome.

I mean, that's weird, isn't it? Because Paul has been the main character, you know, that we've been following for the last few chapters. And haven't we been on this journey with him to Rome precisely in order to find out how his trial went there after he appealed to Caesar?

But Luke tells us nothing. We don't even find out if he ever met Caesar. And come to think of it, the book of Acts tells us hardly anything about where any of the apostles ended up.

[5 : 25] I mean, we heard about James' martyrdom in chapter 12. But apart from that, nothing. What happened to Peter? Andrew? Matthew? Thomas? So, why?

Why does Luke finish his book here and in this way? Why do we have to dig into the annals of church history to find out what happened to the apostles? We're not told about these things in the Bible.

So, I want to begin this morning by just pondering some of these questions with you. Why does Luke finish this way? Because I think if we tackle them, then they'll give us some insight into the overall purpose with which Luke is writing.

And as per usual, probably the best place to go to understand why this book ends the way that it does is to go back to the beginning. So, do you want to come back with me to Acts chapter 1?

Acts chapter 1. And the first thing to remember about the book of Acts is that the name, the Acts of the Apostles, is not original. You know, I've got in my ESV, and I'm using a church Bible this morning because I forgot my own, in my ESV that I'm looking at, our church Bibles.

[6 : 38] It's the Acts of the Apostles. But that title is not original. It's a later edition. Luke didn't call his book the Acts of the Apostles. And if anything, it's not a great name.

It should be called the Acts of the Risen and Reigning Lord Jesus. Nor something like that. Because back in chapter 1, verse 1, remember Luke wrote, in the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.

Until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

So the word began in verse 1 is very important. The implication being that this second book, Luke's Gospel is volume 1, this second book, what we call the book of Acts, is all about what Jesus continued to do and teach.

It just so happens that he continues his ministry in and through human players, the apostles. But that doesn't mean it's not still him at work.

[7 : 51] Jesus is really the main character we have been following all the way through the book, working by his word and spirit through his apostles. Still speaking about the same things we see him speaking about here at the beginning of the book, his resurrection and the kingdom of God.

So from the very beginning we should have known that Luke's not really interested in telling us about all the ins and outs of what happened to the apostles, Peter, Andrew, James, whoever. The apostles, he's interested in telling us about the work of Jesus.

And secondly, and this probably goes without saying, but of course Luke didn't set out to write a comprehensive account of Jesus' continuing work in the world or everything he was doing in the early church.

That is if you could compile such a thing. We know historians always have to be selective with their material and show us history from some angle. Luke has not been trying to show us every detail of every meeting and every evangelistic conversation and every miracle and every time the apostles got up to go to the bathroom.

He's been trying to show us particularly how Jesus spread his gospel from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. So we keep reading from verse 4 to verse 8.

[9 : 15] And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father which he said you heard from me. For John baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

So when they had come together they asked him Lord will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them it is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father is fixed by his own authority but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

Now we talked through the structure of the book of Acts recently I think a few weeks ago so I won't labor the point again but you remember Luke goes through these three broad regions Jerusalem then Judea and Samaria we just discovered when Samaria was we just read about when Samaria was founded didn't we?

Judea and Samaria and then the end of the earth and he has seven smaller panels breaking the narrative into smaller chunks showing how the unstoppable gospel keeps multiplying and increasing and making disciples everywhere it goes breaking down various geographical and ethnic barriers but most importantly spiritual barriers right between God's ancient people and the rest of the world the pagans the heathen but it's worth saying that at the beginning of the book this was completely unexpected by the apostles in particular you see the question that they ask in verse 6 Lord will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?

now sometimes I think that we miss just how Jewish this question is right how Israel centered it is we're so used to Christian jargon right and the way that the theological conversation has developed for the past 2000 years that we forget sometimes to read the Bible on its own terms do you know what I mean?

[11:14] so sometimes we sort of imagine that John actually was a Baptist and Paul was an Anglican and Luther you know he was one of the 12 apostles so the five soldiers must be in here somewhere so then we read things back into the Bible that are important to us in our Christian tradition and we miss things that would have been so obvious and important to the original readers okay so anyway but we need to pay attention to the salvation historical moment here you see the disciples have just come to understand that Jesus is the king the Christ the Messiah the king of the Jews remember that was what was written on his cross and now they're wondering if having died and risen again Jesus is going to reestablish Israel above all the nations is he finally going to kick out the Romans and set up a new golden age like the kind that the people enjoyed under the kings like David and Solomon so when Jesus answers their question in verse 8

I think it's quite likely that the disciples didn't understand his answer you see they asked a Jewish question and he answered you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of now the thing about the word earth in the Greek is that earth doesn't mean globe and earth means land or ground or it can refer to the territory of a nation the earth of Israel or the land of Australia right and so I think it's quite likely that the disciples thought he meant the land of Israel the promised land see what they are expecting is this gospel news to spread through the land of Israel to reunify and revitalize the now smashed and broken ruins of the kingdom of Israel Jerusalem Judea and Samaria Galilee the Negev all of these regions in the land of Israel are going to be reunited under one Davidic king it's only as the book unfolds that it becomes clear that Jesus wasn't just talking about the land of Israel right we all know that don't we but he was talking about the whole earth all the land everywhere but once you understand that the apostles didn't see that at first it starts to make much more sense of the narrative it explains why the disciples didn't take the initiative to break out of the land of Israel did they right at first it's persecution that scatters the church in Jerusalem out into the surrounding regions then it was a vision from Jesus that sent Peter off you know fairly reluctantly to evangelize Cornelius and his household although still within the land of Israel in Acts chapter 15 after Jesus again has taken the initiative to appoint a new special apostle especially for the

Gentile mission we see the whole Jerusalem council troubled by this issue of whether Gentile converts had to be circumcised or not in other words Jesus contrary to his disciples expectations is the one who keeps pushing the gospel outside of its Jewish confines into Gentile communities and even to the Barbaroi the natives in Malta that we met last week see the book of Acts is about how Jesus was determined to get his gospel to the ends of the earth and this was all foretold by the prophet Isaiah had the disciples been listening more closely speaking hundreds of years before Christ in one of the famous servant songs Isaiah predicted that the servant of the Lord would do this listen to Isaiah chapter 49 verse 5 and now the Lord says he who formed you from the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and that Israel might be gathered to him for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord and my God has become my strength he says it is too light a thing that you

should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel I will make you as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth so the book of Acts you see is about showing us the servant's work in action how the Lord Jesus spread his message of salvation not just within the land of Israel but to the end of the whole earth even to bring salvation to people like you and me at the real ends of the earth that's also why it's not so important for the book of Acts to show us how the gospel went to India or went to Africa or China like sort of every new region and every new culture no because as soon as the kind of fundamental barrier between Jews and Gentiles has been broken down as far as the scriptures are concerned there are no new important barriers for the gospel to cross you know it's out there now it's among the nations the distinction between Jew and Gentile is massive the distinction between African and Chinese is nothing but lastly of course

I think Luke wants to finish his book in an unfinished sort of way because the mission of the gospel is not over so sometimes you'll hear people talk about Acts 29 have you heard that kind of language maybe just in I don't know churchy pastory circles I hear it but anyway there's sort of church planting networks and things called Acts 29 as if our churches are still in a sense writing the book of Acts and I don't want to be too nitpicky or controversial but I think there's something simultaneously silly and wonderful about that idea I just want to talk through that briefly and I see what these people are trying to get at I think but on the other hand as per the previous point it's actually really important to understand that the book of Acts is over and that we are not in it and that we can't write Acts 29 or 30 or 31 as if you could just sort of plonk Fox's book of martyrs on the end here because we are not apostles we are not breaking down the barrier between Jew and Gentile anymore in the way that kind of it needs to be achieved here in the book of Acts that would be trying like trying to lay the foundation of a building again and again and again now we are not expected to lay the foundation again or to keep doing foundation style ministry like the apostles and prophets of the [18:12] New Testament I think most obviously we are not expected to do the kinds of miracles we see the apostles doing in the book of Acts these were foundation laying events designed to authenticate the new revelation that the apostles were bringing we are not bringing new revelation again and again and again as if we could bring revelation that supersedes the Lord Jesus likewise I think some people get all nostalgic about the Acts 2 kind of church as if we could somehow go back there when in fact even within the book of Acts there is development isn't there by the time you get to Acts chapter 6 the church has changed a controversy about the distribution of food necessitates a new kind of leadership structure that wasn't there in Acts chapter 2 the appointment of the seven spirit-filled waiters you see we are not apostles we are the recipients of the apostles ministry we are supposed to build upon the foundation that they laid so the book of Acts was about a particular moment in history we can't keep redoing it again and again today but of course as I mentioned there is something wonderful too about this idea of Acts 29

I think and I guess what they're trying to say vividly and succinctly is that Jesus is still working powerfully today which of course is true isn't it he is he is still proclaiming the kingdom and bringing salvation and though we are not apostles he is still using little people like you and me to do this marvelous work and so with that first caveat in mind I still think that Luke finishes the book of Acts this way in a sort of unfinished kind of a way Paul just in the middle of his ministry you know no closure no conclusion because the work of the gospel must continue until Jesus Christ returns Paul and the other apostles died but that wouldn't have been a great place to finish the book because it might have given the impression that gospel ministry was to die along with them when in fact that couldn't be further from the truth instead upon the foundation they laid the spread of the gospel exploded and is still gathering pace today in places like Asia and Africa and South America all right so without further ado let's dive into this chapter of Acts then and see how Luke finishes his unfinished work about the Lord Jesus bringing the gospel from Jews to Gentiles through the apostles there are three sections Acts 28 starting in verse 16 there are three sections as Paul arrives in Rome we learn about his situation first right his accommodation etc and then about his ministry to the Jews so pick it up in verse 16 when we came into Rome Paul was allowed to stay by himself with the soldier who guarded him so Paul is living under house arrest chained to a soldier which I'm sure he thought was a great evangelistic opportunity I think they had to cycle through soldiers so he's probably having great conversations I wish non-Christians would get chained to me but anyway after three days he called the local leaders of the Jews right didn't take him very long did it there's always a sense of urgency about Paul's ministry that is worth imitating after three days

he called 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 now this first section goes from verse 16 down to verse 22 we're not going to go through all the details but really the main theme of the section is Paul's love for the Jews Paul's love for his own people and it's not just national pride there is a theological reason for Paul's ministry practice remember Jesus himself said to the Syrophenician woman with the demon possessed daughter let the children be fed first for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs he's talking about the Jews and the Gentiles the Jews are the children the Gentiles are the dogs and Jesus said it's not right to prioritize Gentiles over Jews let the children be fed first the biological children of Abraham

God made all his promises to the Jews salvation comes from the Jews so Paul always goes to the Jews first wherever he goes he goes to the Jews first to offer them the bread first I think if the Jews in this city had been unreached so far we would still start with them this is always the pattern in the New Testament and in this introductory meeting he wants to make sure that they know he is pro-Jewish right he says in verse 17 I have done nothing against our people I have done nothing against the customs of our fathers in verse 19 he says that even though the Jews were out to get him and wanted the death penalty for him he didn't come to Rome to bring any charge against them he hasn't come to take revenge or to put forward a counter allegation or anything like that and in verse 20 he says for this reason therefore I have asked to see you and speak with you since it is because of the hope of

[23 : 42] Israel that I am wearing this chain you see Paul is trying to explain that he is the archetypal orthodox Jewish patriot he is not anti-semitic he is pro-semitic and he has not rejected the teachings or the customs of his Jewish heritage he is trying to live them out and fulfill them remember how the language of hope has been peppered throughout the recent chapters it first started back in chapter 23 when Paul was first arrested in Jerusalem and he was plonked in the middle of a group of Sadducees and Pharisees he cried out brothers I am a Pharisee a son of Pharisees it is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial or again in chapter 24 verse 15 in front of Felix he describes how he has a hope in God which these men themselves accept that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust so the hope of Israel broadly speaking is the resurrection or the promise of the kingdom the hope that the kingdom will be restored to Israel you remember the disciples original question particularly that hope of the kingdom has to do with the resurrection of the dead that moment when the kingdom of God will be ushered in and established the final judgment day so Paul's point in chapter 28 is that this hope is the hope that Paul has been proclaiming this is what he's been talking about is the hope of Israel it's not a foreign hope it's not a Gentile hope it's the hope of Israel so this is Paul's introductory explanation to the Jews in Rome he doesn't want them to think that he's come to cause trouble he hasn't done any of the evil things for which he's been accused he's actually a Jewish patriot suffering because he's proclaiming the hope of Israel now in verse 21 the Jews in Rome haven't heard anything yet about Paul anyway so they're not worried at all but in verse 22 they have learned about

Christianity more generally notice what they say to Paul we desire to hear from you what your views are for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against now I like this verse this is one of those double-edged verses just by way of example think back to chapter 5 when Peter and the other apostles were arrested and they were standing before the Sanhedrin the high priest said to them this is Acts chapter 5 verse 28 we strictly charged you not to teach in this name yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us so he's furious what they've done is terrible but as readers of Luke's book we're thrilled because what they've done is wonderful and that was exactly the plan to fill Jerusalem with the gospel Jerusalem was stage one well now again at the end of the book you see what we learn about Christianity is that it's being spoken against everywhere but it is being spoken against everywhere you know what I mean in other words the gospel seems to have spread at least as far as the Jews are concerned to the end of the earth it's everywhere the message of the risen king Jesus cannot be stopped even when it's being opposed it's advancing and it's kind of like even bad publicity is good publicity this is always true of the gospel everywhere that it goes that as well as bringing converts bringing salvation it also brings controversy and condemnation it will be spoken against but it's an

unstoppable word even unwittingly being spread by those who resist it and reject it and that's exactly what we see in this next section in verse 23 this unstoppable word meets an immovable people verse 23 when they had appointed a day for him 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 so firstly notice the character of

Paul's ministry here the real guts of it is that he is testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince people about Jesus the word testifying it's the same word we talked about last time I was up here witnessing or it means to speak up in the face of opposition so he is contending for he is arguing the case for the kingdom of God he is trying to explain why we can be certain that Jesus is the king of the kingdom of God and that that kingdom will come etc etc now that is what gospel ministry is always about and at its heart which is why it always needs to be what we're on about here at St.

Lucia Bible Church and I think it is what we're on about by the way don't get me wrong but let me just keep encouraging you to be vigilant about this because it is all too easy for churches to wander off into other things the people around you will pick up what you are most passionate about what you're excited about your kids the Lord has blessed you with children will pick up what you care about what you daydream about when you sing most heartily not just the beliefs you technically subscribe to so make sure that we're always most passionate about King Jesus and his kingdom not our careers not our sporting teams not the Bible or the church community or church history or doctrine not music not the experience not converts not evangelistic strategies

[29 : 56] I mean these are all good things you know I'm listing all wonderful things but let's keep the main thing the main thing we love Jesus our king and his kingdom and we just can't stop talking about it Paul testified to King Jesus from morning till evening so we're having a very long sermon this morning and this evening no and his method so his content is the kingdom his method is to use the scriptures you notice that his ministry is about the gospel the kingdom King Jesus his method is to use the law of Moses and the prophets right the old testament and that's because the bible gives us the richest clearest description of what the kingdom of God is like do you want a 2d picture of Jesus or a 3d picture of Jesus and if you want a 3d picture of Jesus you need to use the bible the bible teaches us what to expect of the king of that kingdom so Paul used the bible the old testament in his evangelism and obviously that would have been especially significant to the jews and accessible to the jews that he was speaking to might take a bit longer with gentiles and people unfamiliar with the bible but eventually all evangelism is going to get to reading your bible getting your bible out and explaining

God's big picture from the bible how the kingdom of God unfolds preparing us for this coming king people need to know that Jesus was the king of the jews now in verse 24 some were convinced by what he said but others disbelieved so here's the jewish response to Paul's ministry the gospel always brings division notice here how Luke describes the division right it's not that some people understood his gospel and some people misunderstood as if the division you know really happens between the smart and the dumb it's not that some people liked it and some people didn't as if the division is really about you know personalities or emotional preferences and that's not quite it and actually listen to how the NIV puts it some were convinced by what he said but others would not believe and I think that captures the Greek a little better there is a stubbornness here that Luke is talking about a refusal to believe you know it's all well and good to have questions and even doubts some doubts are just honest aren't they but some doubts are cynical and some doubts are actually dishonest people don't want to believe the truth so they find all sorts of silly reasons to find fault and be uncertain and be unclear because ignorance and confusion and doubt actually suits their sinful desires I remember a friend who used to say in the music industry it's cool to be searching for God but it's not cool to have found him our sinful desires are like that aren't they and I should say our because I know that I can be like this too and the Bible says something I don't want to be true I find ways to be confused about it and that's what Luke is describing here so Paul picks up on this last comment and shows us the spiritual significance of it when he quotes from Isaiah he's saying there's a spiritual thing happening here these people's hearts have become calloused or literally fat they have big fat hearts thick hearts leathery hearts and they've got heavy ears elephant time they're just slow and sluggish they're not perky and attentive and their eyes are closed so they have eyes but they're not using them and actually

Paul recognizes that this is the judgment of God upon them that he has hardened their hearts and closed their eyes in the original context the quote is from Isaiah chapter 6 so again let's go there together Isaiah is sort of almost slap bang in the middle of your Bibles Isaiah chapter 6 in my church Bible it's on page 571 if you remember Isaiah chapter 6 it's Isaiah's commissioning Isaiah has this overwhelming vision of God seated on his throne this glorious towering incomprehensible figure and the angels all around are crying holy holy holy is the Lord of hosts the whole earth is full of his glory that's verse 3 and everything is shaking and Isaiah is terrified because he's so sinful so in verse 5 he says woe is me for I am lost for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips for my eyes have seen the King the Lord of hosts
Isaiah is describing himself as a spiritual leper but then Isaiah has his lips cleansed and the Lord speaks to him saying whom shall I send and who will go for us and Isaiah puts his hand up and says here I am send me verse 9 and he said go and say to this people keep on hearing but do not understand keep on seeing but do not perceive make the hearts of this people dull and their ears heavy and blind their eyes lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed so obviously that's that's our quote and then afterwards Isaiah says how long oh Lord in other words how long am I going to have to endure am I going to have to do this ministry of judgment this ministry of condemnation of hardening and the [36 : 14] Lord said until cities lie waste without inhabitants and houses without people and the land is a desolate waste and the Lord removes people far away and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land and though a tenth remain in it it will be burned again like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains when it is felled the holy seed is its stump so that's Isaiah's commissioning and Isaiah was commissioned to bring judgment upon Israel to blind their eyes and harden their hearts even further so that they would continue to sin and ultimately be destroyed Isaiah was commissioned not to bring about a day of repentance but to stop the people of Israel from repenting and it's part of the bigger point of the whole book of Isaiah which is that ultimate salvation for Israel and for the whole world will only come through the destruction and judgment upon Israel at its most sinful like a refining or purifying fire

God has a plan to burn his people right down to a holy seed that can then regrow into a holy nation now this is why Paul is bringing it up here because of course that holy seed turned out to be the Lord Jesus the only righteous Israelite left standing at the end of the judgment he took on the judgment of God at the cross and came through it because of his righteousness he's the only bit that isn't dross he rose from the dead and then began the rebuild of the nation through the preaching of the gospel and yet as Paul explains in Romans chapter 11 the character of gospel ministry in these last days is still going to have this kind of Isaiah shape to it this cross shape to it as the natural descendants of Abraham are hardened to the gospel this is precisely what causes salvation to flow out to the

Gentiles so in fact Paul sees himself as a new Isaiah and he describes himself this way on several occasions in the book he was commissioned by the glorious towering figure of the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus that was his Isaiah 6 moment if you like now Paul has been sent out to do Isaiah 6 kind of ministry both to harden the Jews by and large to bring salvation so that salvation then flows to the Gentiles and to the ends of the earth okay so back in Acts chapter 28 in verse 28 Paul says therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles they will listen so pay attention to this there is a sense in which the gospel still hardens even Gentile hearts and divides Gentile audiences of course but that is not Paul's general expectation of gospel ministry among the Gentiles is it Paul's general expectation is that they will listen that the gospel will be positively received by Gentiles and this ought to fill us with great confidence and boldness as we preach among the Gentiles right I think in Australia today all too often we tend to think that we are an exception to this rule that people will be hardened to the gospel skeptical apathetic disinterested and I'm sure there's more than a grain of truth to that there is something to the fact that we are a very wealthy and comfortable nation and that we have forgotten our Christian heritage and in some sense been inoculated by it we've been hardened by our privileged familiarity to the gospel things like the enlightenment the world wars the sexual revolution have all contributed to the decline of our churches

I get that but that is not the whole story is it and actually I think a huge part of the story since the 1960s is the emptying out of the nominals certainly nominalism is in decline and long may it continue because we are not just interested in census ticking Christians are we no we are actually

interested in real Christians born again gospel transformed Christians and faithful churches and in many ways I think we have reason to rejoice in the growing number of good churches around the place many of you will know this more than me certainly in Brisbane 30 years ago when uni church was started were there heaps of gospel churches around really thriving by all accounts no there were very few bible teaching gospel focused christ adoring churches around this city I think that's why uni church was started wasn't it but now there are heaps of good churches around aren't there [41 : 38] I mean not nearly enough but there are a bunch of baptists presbyterian and independent churches preaching the gospel and growing we should be encouraged that actually we live in an age of gospel expansion where the unstoppable word is spreading to the ends of the earth it's spreading in Africa and Asia and South America and it's even spreading here and even though there may be ups and downs and frustrations and problems and barriers to the gospel and not everyone will listen by and large Paul says of the Gentiles they will listen because salvation is a matter of God's sovereignty and this is his plan for this age Christ's continuing work in this age is to get the gospel out to the Gentiles it's not just you and me out there doing it it is Christ still continuing his work in and through us which brings us finally to Luke's last paragraph he says

Paul 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 the key word here I think is all Paul welcomed all who came and he preached with all boldness right the point is Luke wants to end on a big expansive global vision of gospel ministry Paul turned away no one and he didn't hold back anything he was constantly crystal clear up front commending himself to everyone's conscience is how he put it into Corinthians he was earnest in his gospel proclamation he was still proclaiming the same message of the kingdom and the Lord Jesus Christ the king that we saw Jesus was proclaiming back in chapter one of course notice Paul preaches the same message both to Jews and Gentiles in this chapter there is no need to change the message depending on the audience such an idea is ridiculous and unfaithful Paul preached with boldness literally it means unhinderedly so remember he's in chains and he's in chains at this point but his gospel ministry is completely unchained he's unfettered he's preaching the gospel unhinderedly so to wrap up let me just reiterate that that is how Luke wants us to continue in evangelism today not shy not coy not embarrassed or ashamed or awkward as if what we have is average news or bad news but bold and public and out there and frankly not from you guys particularly but as a warning I still hear plenty of voices around us that seem to be encouraging the opposite and I mean our Christian friends and our brothers and sisters and leaders and other churches and organizations so I think we have to be very sharp on this distinction are we encouraged in the

New Testament to do evangelism in quiet sort of casual subtle ways just in the context of a few close relationships where we've earned the right to speak whatever that means as if Jesus doesn't have the right to speak to his subjects and is our main aim to show that Christianity is kind of normal and we're normal and can fit in to a kind of secular world view and as we talk about Jesus we're just saying that this is our perspective our opinion and obviously having a different opinion is totally fine but you know have you considered Jesus and what whether being a Christian might work for you and that is one way that I think a lot of people are trying to encourage me to do evangelism but the Apostle Paul's evangelism seems to me to be very very different you know he talked boldly it means freely openly very publicly like on the day of

Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 when people thought the disciples were drunk because they were just so unhindered just walking up to people with good news Paul was enthusiastic he was earnest so instead I think we should be saying to people you know what I have the best news in the world have you heard it I want everyone to hear about it and it's true it is a historical fact right as certain as Hitler marched into Poland if you believe that or Caesar conquered the Gauls if you believe that Jesus marched out of that tomb and conquered death it's just a historical fact it's wonderful and life changing and urgent and it makes a demand on you and on every single human being on this planet today it is like a freight train that is coming whether you like it or not this is happening people we need to get with the program get with the reality now brothers and sisters

[46 : 58] I don't want to be a hypocrite but this is not me every day I'm confessing my sins to you I don't want to hold myself up as an example or some kind of you know brilliant evangelist that's just not the case because I feel very much just as weak and cowardly and intimidated as any one of us but I don't want to assuage my own guilt or fears or something by misreading the New Testament I

can read and surely that is the bold New Testament kind of evangelism that is being held out as our example here thank goodness I don't have to be an example because Paul is our example I'm just trying to grow and make progress now that the apostolic generation is over the baton has been passed to us we are not laying the foundation again we can't lay the foundation again but will we build upon the foundation with certainty and boldness and love for our fellow human beings maybe we should have a conference about this let's pray loving father god have mercy upon us thank you so much for the good news that it has spread to the end of the earth and we who were just as dead and hardened in our sin as anyone else were rescued and saved and delivered out of the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of your beloved son our

Lord Jesus Christ we do pray father that your gospel would continue to fill our hearts and rule over us grip us transform our lives and any areas of sin that still linger help us to kill them off and put them to death and may that gospel in our hearts also be on our lips spreading as enthusiastically and as boldly as we can and with your spirit giving us the courage that we need to people we meet on the bus just everyone Lord that you might bring salvation to Gentiles and Jews in this place we ask these things in Jesus name Amen