

The Bible in One Year Week 27: With All Boldness (Acts Pt. 5)

(Acts 26:19-27:1, 28:16, 28:30-31)

• Unfinished Business

- After such a wild journey, Acts ends in a pretty quiet, anti-climactic way. In fact, it leaves a lot of unfinished business. Paul's journeys have taken him through a roller coaster of obstacles. And in the final section, the whole story has been building our anticipation: what will happen when Paul finally appears before Caesar, the most powerful person in that world? How will this story end? But when he arrives in Rome, it concludes with this simple statement: *"For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!"*
- *The end. Roll credits. Wait, what?!* It'd be like reading the memoir of a great expedition, let's say a group climbing Mount Everest, and just as the suspense is building—just before they're about to face their greatest challenge on the way to achieving the goal—the story ends.
- *We want to see what happens to Paul! There are so many questions, we have to know how the story ends!* And that's the point for Luke: the story hasn't ended, the work hasn't finished, we have a choice to make and a part to play. Even today, 2,000 years later: *we have a part to play.* The commission Jesus gave to the first disciples, he gave to the early church, he gave to Paul, he gives to all of us: *"you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth."* Witnesses to his alternative Kingdom of love and righteousness and peace; witnesses to his saving, life-transforming work; his life, death, and resurrection; witnesses to the great hope of eternal life and New Creation; witnesses to his Lordship, his unique identity as the Son of God who lived among us and died that we might truly live. We're called to play our part and continue this story until all things are complete and he returns.

• How?

- And that leads me to ask, *how?* I want to. But how. How do I play my part? How do I, here in 2021, continue this story that began so long ago? How can I possibly play a role in something as huge as this Story? How does the church keep this mission going?
- Well, a short and simple answer can be found in the very last verse, 28:31. *"He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!"*
- That's the secret, that's the simple formula right there. That's what Jesus said they would do in the beginning, Acts 1:8, *"You will receive power with the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* And that's exactly what we saw happen throughout Acts, right up to this final verse. And history confirms that this is what *continued to happen* as the Gospel really did spread throughout the world, to this day.
- *"He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!"* When the Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit, proclaims the Kingdom of Jesus and the Life of Jesus, with bold, unhindered faith, by our words, our actions, and our lives, the mission spreads. The Story continues.
- **Bold, unhindered faith.** Of real, normal, everyday people, everywhere, who walk with Jesus. That's what spreads the movement.

• Bold, Unhindered Faith

- Let's look at what that meant for Paul and the first Christians and what it means for us today. Here's what's amazing about that statement for Paul's life: he was experiencing *innumerable* obstacles, living under the most powerful empire in the world and facing enemies from all sides. Christ gave him a call to take this message all over the empire, and he was following through. But all along the way, he was being "hindered" at every turn: threats from the Jews, threats from the gentiles, threats from merchants and threats from rulers, mobs, beatings, floggings, stonings, trials, prisons, shipwrecks, and now house arrest in Rome.

- The point is that, no matter how great the opposition became, all of it was used to advance the Gospel. Paul actually wrote that while in prison. He said to the Philippians, “*What has happened to me has actually served to advance the Gospel!*” The ridicule, the persecution, the trials, the prisons, the voyages, even the house arrest—it was actually taking the Good News to places and people it never would have otherwise reached.
- Furthermore, it was during this time that Paul wrote his most important letters which would go on to influence the spread of the Gospel through the ages—it’s called the New Testament!
- “*He proclaimed the kingdom of God...with all boldness and without hindrance!*” Christians can be chained and Christians can be killed, but the Gospel cannot be chained and the Gospel cannot be killed because it’s the good news of the King who conquered death.
- Persecution cannot hinder the Gospel of Jesus, misunderstanding and ridicule and rejection cannot hinder the Gospel of Jesus, imprisonment cannot hinder the Gospel, enemies cannot hinder the Gospel, death cannot hinder the Gospel—because it’s about the King who overcame all these things *by subjecting himself to death on a cross* and now he lives and reigns.
- The only thing that hinders the spread of the Gospel is us. When we compromise, when we choose comfort and apathy, when we share our allegiance with other gods, other idols, when we grieve the Holy Spirit by scorning this gift of freedom, when we let the voice of fear become louder than the voice of Jesus—then it’s hindered. But it’s not hindered by anything else.
- It wasn’t hindered by these things in Paul’s life because his faith was real and it was *bold*. Everything we see from these early Christians in Acts is that they were *bold*.
 - They were *bold* because the Apostles and several hundred followers of Jesus (over 500 according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 15) had actually *seen* the risen Jesus. They had really experienced it and they could not deny it and they could not help sharing it.
 - They were *bold* because all kinds of different people throughout their world were coming to Christ and having their lives *transformed* by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
 - They were *bold* because once they caught the truth of God’s beautiful Kingdom and the hope it gives, there was no other vision for life that could be more compelling or satisfying.
 - They were *bold* because they saw the power of God at work among them—there were signs and wonders that pointed to the fact that God really was with them.
 - They were *bold* because they *were* being challenged and tested—and through that opposition, God strengthened their resolve.
 - They were *bold* because Christ himself, through the Holy Spirit working in believers’ lives, was calling people everywhere to repent, become his followers, and live for his Kingdom.
- **You and Me**
 - And as I read all of this, I’m so inspired and challenged. Because I can see the vision of life it’s laying out, and I can still see the gap between what it could be and what it is right now. I can see the gap between where my faith is and where it could be. And at the end of the day, I’m compelled by the love of Christ, to keep stumbling forward by grace to grow from one degree to the next, to become more of the person Christ created me to be.
 - When I see that word “boldness” in the Scriptures, in the life of Paul, I’m so challenged and intrigued. Because...*I am not a bold person*. I have passion, and in the right circumstances, like in front of a crowd, I can find my courage and put out some strong energy.
 - But at my core, I am really afraid of confrontation. I’m just being real. My natural wiring is so conflict-averse. I don’t know if it’s how I was born, or the way I grew up: I was always shy, and as the middle child with a pretty bold, outspoken older brother, and a home where we had our share of conflicts, I found myself naturally gravitating to the role of *peacemaker*. I’m the type of person who can see any scenario from like five different sides. So, it’s hard for me to take sides, and as soon as I get a hint of opposition, my reaction is to shrink back. I almost can’t control it, it’s like a social anxiety.
 - So, when I think about witnessing boldly for Christ, in this world that’s full of different beliefs and doubts and criticisms, I’m so challenged. I want to live a bold and unhindered faith, with the life Christ has given me. Yet, it kind of goes against every fiber of my personality. But that’s the

thing: because it's not my natural disposition, I know that I can *only do it* by the power of God, by totally surrendering, and letting him use my weakness. I know that if it happens, it's not because of me. I know that all things are possible with Christ and he can do whatever he wants with me, and even though I fail, he'll finish the good work he started.

- So, that's my goal for life as I read Acts: *Lord, I want to live a bold, unhindered faith. I want to see a church full of people with bold, unhindered faith. Lord, would you show us what that means? Would you help us do that and be that, in this crazy world?*
 - The relieving truth is, *we don't all have to do it the same way.* We don't have to be like Paul, or Peter, or Pastor David. We all have different testimonies, gifts, and personalities (some of you are the opposite of me—some of you are naturally *very bold*, like Paul, so your journey's different.) *But we all have a unique part to play.* We live it out by our words, our actions, and our lives. And there are a thousand ways to do it each day.
 - We continue this mission when we make a meal, when we visit someone who's lonely, when we lead a Bible study, when we serve the food bank, when we pray with a co-worker, when we tithe to the church. We continue this mission when we stand in front of a crowd to share the Word, when we share a worship service on social media, when we invite a friend to church, when we get alone in a closet somewhere and pray, *"Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."* The point is, we get to partner with God to continue the Story. And as long as we're here, there's more; he's not finished with us yet.
 - William Booth, the co-founder of the Salvation Army, spoke these words in May of 1912, just three months before his death: *"While women weep, as they do now, I'll fight; while little children go hungry, as they do now, I'll fight; while men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I'll fight; while there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor girl lost upon the streets, while there remains one dark soul without the light of God I'll fight—I'll fight to the very end!"*
- Let's add our chapter to the book of Acts. What stories will it tell? Will it say we played it safe and insulated ourselves from the world? Or will it say we went with God to the places in our backyard that most needed the Light? Let's live a bold and unhindered faith, that when we finish our race, we'll know that we've played the part he made us for. Amen.