

The 29th Chapter of Acts

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Date: 03 March 2013

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[0:00] I want to bring a message this morning that will tie these two things together and especially help us hopefully and I prayerfully will help us see just how significant this will be for us as a church.

! And I'm taking as my text this morning the very last verse of Luke's second volume. That is the Acts of the Apostles. So you can be turning to the book of Acts right now if you would like.

And I will tell you here that my primary focus for this sermon will be one on one single word in this passage that I'm going to have you look at here in just a moment.

One single word. Sermon out of one word. Sermon out of one single word. And it's the last word of the book of Acts. At least it is in the Greek text.

Not necessarily in every version or English versions. And so it is the final chapter, the final verse, the final word in the book of Acts.

[1:19] Acts chapter 28 and verse 31. Would you look at it with me? Preaching the kingdom of God. Preaching the kingdom of God.

And teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence. No one forbidding him. Now that's the last verse of the book of Acts.

Now I would say to you that from a literary standpoint. Not that I'm some literary genius. And I would add to that even from a grammatical standpoint or perspective.

Luke ends the book of Acts in a very unusual way. He ends the book with an adverb. This is an adverb.

Now it's not very easy to see that in our English translations. For example, in the King James Version, and some of you have that version this morning. It ends this way. No man forbidding him.

[2:19] That's four English words to translate one Greek word. In the New King James Version, I just read that a moment ago. It's very similar. No one forbidding him.

If you have a New American Standard, and many of you have that, it is perhaps closest to the original, and it ends with the word unhindered. Unhindered.

Some of you have the NIV, and it takes the word and moves it to the front of the verse, and it is translated without hindrance. Now, literally though, in the Greek text, and you'll have to take my word for it, Luke ends the verse with an adverb.

And I could translate, we could very accurately translate it, unhinderedly. That's how the book of Acts ends.

That's how Luke ended this book. Unhinderedly. And so we might be asking, is that it, Luke? Is that the end of it? If you know anything about the final portions of the book, then you know that Paul is in Rome, and you also know that Paul is in prison.

[3:36] In fact, he's been in prison now for two years. And so we're asking, what happened after that? What happened to Paul?

Did Paul get out of prison, or did he remain in prison until he died? There's some indication from one of his epistles that he was indeed released from prison, only to be possibly re-imprisoned and ultimately put to death, but we really don't know.

Did Paul have the opportunity to go where he wanted to go, to go all the way to Spain and maybe to other parts of the western world of the day? We don't know. We're not told.

Luke just ends it with the word unhinderedly. It's kind of like receiving a text from someone who accidentally hit the send button before they finished it, you know.

Or maybe more aptly it would be like an author writing a story and then failing to tie up some of the critical loose ends. Maybe leaving the hero of the story in some tight spot, and then the story just kind of ends there without any resolution, without any real ending to the story.

[4:44] Unhinderedly is how Luke ended the book of Acts. Why did Luke do that? Did something happen to Luke so that he couldn't finish it? Maybe Luke's intention was to write a third volume, as some scholars have supposed.

You know, there's the Gospel of Luke, and there's Acts, and then maybe Acts Part 2. Or maybe it's Acts of the early church. Is that what happened here?

I don't think so. Maybe, as some have supposed, that he just never got around to writing that third chapter, or third book. Something hindered him. Or maybe he did write it, and it was just lost to us, and we don't have it today.

Now, I think that Luke intended to end the book of Acts just the way he did. And even more importantly, of course, the Holy Spirit led Luke and intended for Luke in the book just that way. Kind of like a cliffhanger. And primarily, I think it's because Acts was never, ever about Paul. It was never, ever about Peter before him, or any of the other apostles, or any other leaders in the early church there in Jerusalem.

[5:58] It was never about that. It was always about the Gospel. And always about the advance of the Kingdom of God. But also, I would say, and based upon that, I would say that Luke ended the book of Acts with a cliffhanger because he did that for us, with us in mind today.

With the church in mind. The church that would come after and for us today. And so, when we understand that, then I think that we're going to see the significance of what we're about to do here today, in just a moment.

Luke's unusual ending to this book, the book of Acts, points us to three things that I want to share with you very quickly. Three very important things for us to get as a church.

First of all, this is a promise. Unhinderedly, this kind of verb on the end of this glorious book, the book of Acts, unhinderedly is a promise.

It's a sovereign promise. The adverb unhinderedly, I think, explains why we as a church, as Highland Park Baptist Church, are to be involved in, work very hard toward the further advance of the gospel to the world.

[7:28] Unhinderedly points us to that. Because it is a promise. It speaks of a promise. And to see that, I think it would be good for us to back up just one phrase in this verse to the phrase that comes right before unhindered or no man forbidding him.

And it is the phrase, at least in the New King James Version, it is the phrase, with all confidence. Do you see that there? Now, some of you, in your Bibles, you may have the word boldness.

Some of you might have the word openness. But it's that part of the verse that I want you to back up to. With me, it's with all confidence. And by the way, just like the final phrase in our English Bibles, this second to the last phrase is also a translation of one single word in the Greek text.

And it is a word that has a very rich meaning. In fact, it is a word that we could say has a threefold meaning.

And it's not one or the other or the other. It is all of those wrapped up together. A threefold meaning to this word that's translated in the King James and New King James, with all confidence.

[8:40] A threefold meaning. In the first place, it means this. It means that to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ candidly.

We're to proclaim the gospel and advance the gospel around the world, and we're to do so candidly. Now, what does that mean? Well, what I mean by that is we're not to soften it.

We're not to hide any part of it, any portion of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is, we are not to present a partial gospel in an effort to make it more believable, or more palatable, or more acceptable in our politically correct society in which we live.

We're to give the full gospel. We're to proclaim it candidly. We're not to soften the seriousness of sin for one thing. That's part of the gospel. We're not to somehow exclude the importance of the law of God, and that it is to be upheld, and it is to be obeyed, and when we don't obey it, it's sin.

We're not to withhold that from the presentation of the gospel. We are not to omit God's requirement for repentance in the gospel, as many do.

[9:56] We're not to hide the truth about God's judgment if you do not repent, if you do not believe. And so we're to proclaim the gospel candidly.

That's what this word means. With all confidence, we are to proclaim the gospel candidly. But also, we are to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ clearly.

Clearly. And this is so important. That is, with no vague, or obscure, or confusing language at all. The best we can. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 14, he said, For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, then who will prepare himself for battle?

We're to proclaim the gospel candidly, withholding no part of it. We are to proclaim the gospel clearly, with no uncertain sound, or uncertain communication.

Nothing vague about it. And then finally, and this, I think, is the primary meaning, we're to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ confidently. Confidently.

[11:00] And we can present it, and declare it confidently. In this sense. With no fear of consequence. You say, are there no consequences when you share the gospel?

Well, yeah, there's plenty of consequences. And many have experienced that over the years. Many, even today, are experiencing the very severe consequences of proclaiming the gospel.

And so you might ask, how then can we declare it confidently, in the sense that we have no fear of confidence, or, excuse me, consequences? Well, there are consequences, we just don't fear them. And so we're to present the gospel in that way, with no fear of consequences. We're to present it confidently. But I would add to that, that we are also, and this is even better, we're to declare it with no fear of failure.

This is what I want us to get. And this, I believe, is the primary meaning behind this word that is translated with all confidence. We're to declare it confidently, in the sense that we fear no failure.

[12:14] Seriously. No failure. Do you see? This is how we as a church get in on God's program for advancing and growing His kingdom in the world unhinderedly.

We proclaim the kingdom of God, the Bible says, and we teach the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, unhinderedly.

Unhinderedly. This is a promise. This is a sovereign, the sovereign promise of God. And by the way, the book of Acts is the indisputable evidence of this promise.

Just read it. The book of Acts documents for us, in a very accurate style, as Luke did, it documents for us the incredible, astounding advance of the gospel to the world, starting in Jerusalem, there in the capital, excuse me, the birthplace of the church.

And then it ends with the gospel being declared in Rome, the capital of the civilized world of the day. And so really, what we have there in Acts is the fulfillment of Acts 1.8, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the end of the world.

[13:27] And in that day, Rome represented that end of the world. And so we have this document of the advance of the gospel, and there were huge obstacles all along the way.

I mean, you read them on every page of the book of Acts. These obstacles to the gospel, and yet Luke says repeatedly, and here's one example, in Acts 12, verse 24, Luke wrote, but the word of God continued to increase and spread.

Nothing could stop it. Nothing could stop it. And nothing can stop it even today. The gospel. It cannot be stopped by the obstacles of geography.

Certainly we don't have that obstacle anymore, do we? And it cannot be stopped by the opposition of governments. We still have that today. Paul had that in his day. Paul had been thrown into prison.

That did not stop the gospel. Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2.9, I am suffering bound with chains as a criminal. But then listen to what he said.

[14:34] But the word of God is not bound. It's not bound. Unhinderedly. See, this is a promise. It may be a strange way to end a book, and maybe we have this thought that we wish Luke could give us a little bit more, at least let us know what happened to Paul.

It may be a strange way to end the book with this adverb unhinderedly, but it's a promise. It's intended to be a promise. Preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, unhinderedly.

Second, this is a prayer. It's not only a promise, but it represents a prayer. A very specific prayer. Now, dear people, it's not a contradiction to say that the unhindered gospel depends upon the prayers of God's people. Our prayer is where we join in, join with God and join in this unhindered gospel.

We're to pray specifically for the advance of God's kingdom around the world. We are, for example, to pray for Jay and me who serve faithfully in communist China.

[15 : 48] We're to pray for Martin who serves the underground churches in Guangdong Providence in China. We're to pray for him. We're to pray, we must pray for Jing and Mei and countless other pastors of house churches in that part of China.

We're to pray for them. We must pray for the Ukraine. We must pray for Odessa Seminary as they train hundreds of young men to be pastors of churches in that formerly communist country and may one day be communist again.

We're to pray for Sasha Abramov, a professor, teacher, and many of the other teachers at that seminary as they train these men. We're to pray for Vladimir and his church that we have partnered with right outside of Odessa, Ukraine.

We must pray for the churches in Malawi, Brother Coons. We must pray for the churches in Leon, Mexico. We must pray for Sean who very soon is going to be traveling to East Asia to work with the persecuted pastors.

We're to pray for him. Pray for him. We're to pray for Voice of the Martyrs. We're to pray for the persecuted church around this world. And closer to home, we're to pray for the Open Bible Baptist Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

[17 : 07] And still even closer, we're to pray for the churches here in Bartlesville and at that Dewey and in our county and in our neighboring county in Osage and the churches of Washington and Osage Baptist Associates.

How glorious it is when the gospel advances unhinderedly. Unhinderedly is a strange ending, but this is a promise. It's a promise, a sovereign promise.

And it is a prayer, a specific prayer that we're to be involved in and committed to. And then thirdly and finally, it is a priority.

This is a priority. A serious priority for our church. In London, in 1942, Hitler's Luftwaffe had invaded the English skies.

And all of Britain was in terror of Nazi Germany. Air raid sirens were going off repeatedly.

[18 : 18] Bombs whistling down to the ground. Deafening explosions. Destruction in nearly every quarter of London. Death.

Death. What could Winston Churchill say to embolden the people of Britain to courage? On November 10th, he addressed his people with these immortal words.

He said, Now this is not the end. He said. He said, It is not the beginning of the end. But it is perhaps, he said, The end of the beginning.

The end of the beginning. Dear people, that would be a great way to characterize Luke's final word in the book of Acts. It is not the end of the story.

It is not even the beginning of the end. But rather, it is the end of the beginning. Unhinderedly is the end of the beginning of the advance of the gospel to the world.

[19 : 31] Now listen to me very carefully. In reality, Luke's closing word in chapter 28 is meant to be a transition and introduction to the 29th chapter of Acts.

You say, Well, Pastor, far be it for me to correct you, but there is no 29th chapter of Acts. Oh, yes, there is. Yes, there is a 29th chapter.

The 29th chapter of Acts is going on right now. It has been, in a sense, going on for now 2,000 years.

And it is being written as we speak. Acts 29. And let me say this. Highland Park Baptist Church is part of the 29th chapter of Acts.

Acts 29. Acts 29. We are writing it today. We are about to write a part of that chapter right here today in just a moment.

[20 : 56] And it remains to be seen just how it will be written. Unhinderedly then means that we can step out in faith today and we can commit ourselves to support a really bold strategy and plan for missions.

One that has the world in view and we can be assured of God's promise that it will be successful. And what could be better than that? To know that our commitment to reach the world with the gospel will be successful.

We have that promise. Unhinderedly tells us that. Unhinderedly also means that we must as a church be faithful to pray for the advance of the kingdom of God to the entire world.

We must have the world in view but we can't go everywhere in the world. We can go where God directs us and support that going and it will be a small slice of it and yet it's very important.

Our prayers go where we cannot go and so unhinderedly compels us to be committed in prayer for the advance of the kingdom of God.

[22:17] unhinderedly means that Acts 29 is now. It's right now. And it's not completed and won't be completed until Jesus comes.

Preaching of the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence unhinderedly is our priority today.

It always has been. But today we're more free than we've been in years to commit to that priority. Imagine if you will with me imagine partnering with a church in Odessa, Ukraine. Helping them supporting them to reach their community with the gospel.

Supporting them in their vision to plant additional churches in neighboring villages around Odessa. Imagine being part of that. Imagine supporting Odessa Baptist Theological Seminary.

[23:40] to help train hundreds of pastors who in turn will serve in churches in Ukraine that will reach tens of thousands of Ukrainians for Christ.

Imagine being a part of that. Imagine training and encouraging pastors and church leaders in China. Communist China.

helping to equip them and train them to reach the multiplied millions of people in just that one city in Shenzhen.

And in addition to that Dongguan city another 12 million people. Imagine being a part of that. To train church pastors and leaders who pastor the some 10,000 underground churches in that one city.

And being a part of the advance of the kingdom to see countless thousands maybe millions come to Christ. Could we be a part of that?

[25:00] Imagine supporting a ministry that's right here in our backyard that reaches out to encourage and support the persecuted church around the world.

Supporting those pastors and their families and other church leaders so that they then are enabled by the grace of God to reach countless I don't know a number to put on it.

In those countries where the gospel is strictly illegal. Imagine being a part of that. Imagine being part of planting a Hispanic church.

It's been our dream. Once was a reality and now it's a dream again. It's where God wants us to go to plant a Hispanic church here that can hear the gospel.

People of a growing part of our community. Imagine it being a part of it. Imagine helping to revitalize a church here in Bartlesville and a part of our community that needs the gospel desperately and yet the churches there are struggling.

[26:36] What can we do as a part of that? Imagine the implications of that and the multiplication of that. I would say even imagine planting a new church.

You say we've got plenty of churches here. Do we? Imagine being a part of planting a new church in our county maybe even in our city.

Imagine that. See this is what I want us to get. We're living in the days of the 29th chapter of Acts. We must see that. And today we will have made two entries in that ongoing chapter.

One that closes the past. Closes the past. The paying off of the debt on our building.

And the other opens us to a very new, very exciting future. A commitment to a different kind of debt.

[27:50] Something that makes the word debt a good word. it's our gospel debt to the world.

Because like Paul in Romans 14, we're debtors to everyone.

And so like Paul, we're ready to go everywhere because we're not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.

A gospel debt to the world. Commitment to fund a mission strategy that has the world in view.