

INTRODUCTION:

As we begin this morning, I would like to invite you to turn with me to the book of **Acts**, and specifically, I would like for us to look together at **Acts 28**.

- We know that the book of **Acts** starts with Jesus going back into heaven, but before He leaves, He tells the disciples that they are to be His witnesses, *“...in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”*
- In **Acts 2**, the Lord’s church is established as 3,000 people repent of their sins and are immersed in water for the forgiveness of those sins.
- The book continues as the apostles start heading out in all directions.
- The first half of the book focuses in on Peter and John, and then the focus shifts to a persecutor of the church by the name of Saul, a leading Jew and apparently at one time a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling body.
- In **Acts 9**, Saul obeys the gospel, his name is changed to Paul, and Paul then goes on a series of missionary journeys as he teaches God’s word all over the Mediterranean world.
- On one of his final journeys, he is being taken to Rome to stand trial on some false accusations that were being made by his fellow Jews, and on the trip to Rome, the ship runs aground during a storm on the island of Malta.
- Some of you might remember the Malta Summit that was held off the coast of Malta back in 1989.
- It was a meeting between President George H. W. Bush and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.
- Someone had the bright idea of holding the meeting on a Soviet cruise ship, and the waves were so intense that people were getting seasick.
- I remember the news footage from back then, and I remember one of our aircraft carriers just bobbing all around in the Mediterranean Sea.
- The waves were just huge. That is where Paul shipwrecked—on the coast of Malta.
- Nevertheless, after several months, they eventually make it to Rome, and Paul ends up chained to a Roman soldier under house arrest for a period of two years.

In just a moment, I would like for us to look at **Acts 28:16-31**.

- But even before we look at all of our text for this morning, I would like for us to notice something rather unusual about the very end of the book of **Acts**.
- As we look down at the very last verse, we find that it ends rather abruptly.
- There is no “Amen,” there is no farewell, there is no list of names like many of the other New Testament books—nothing.
- The book just ends. Paul is under house arrest awaiting trial on false charges in the capital city of the Roman Empire, and we are not told what happens next.
- But as we look ahead at **Acts 28:31**, we notice that the author closes by saying that Paul was, *“...preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.”*
- The very last word in the book of Acts is *“unhindered.”* What a strange statement!
- Here is Paul, fresh from surviving a shipwreck, in chains, under house arrest in a rented apartment, being held on false charges, getting ready to go to trial before the wicked emperor Nero, and yet he is *“unhindered”* in the preaching of the gospel.
- Certainly, there must be a mistake...and yet there is no mistake!

This morning, as we look at Paul's success in preaching, as we look at the fact that he was "*unhindered*" in spite of some very challenging circumstances, and as we look at our own challenges today, as we reach out to a county of nearly half a million people, I would like for us to look at the last half of **Acts 28** as we ask ourselves: What is God trying to teach us in this account?

- If you will, please look with me at **Acts 28:16-31**...

16 When we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him.

17 After three days Paul called together those who were the leading men of the Jews, and when they came together, he began saying to them, "Brethren, 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.

18 "And when they had examined me, they were willing to release me because there was no ground for putting me to death.

19 "But when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar, not that I had any accusation against my nation.

20 "For this reason, therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you, for I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel."

21 They said to him, "We have neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren come here and reported or spoken anything bad about you.

22 "But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere."

23 When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening.

24 Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe.

25 And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers,

26 saying, 'GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY, "YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE;

27 FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES; OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.'"

28 "Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen."

29 When he had spoken these words, the Jews departed, having a great dispute among themselves.

30 And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him,

31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

What an amazing passage! And as we look at it very carefully this morning, I would like for us to focus in on the very last word.

- With all of the challenges, with all of the obstacles, with everything working against him, how was the apostle Paul able to be so "*unhindered*," how was he able to be so successful in teaching the gospel?
- Why did God put this account in the Bible?
- And as we study, I would like for us to apply what we learn to our efforts at outreach right here in Salem.

- How can we, like the apostle Paul, be missionaries for God without even leaving our own hometowns?

I. One of the first things we notice is that in spite of all the challenges and setbacks, PAUL MADE HIMSELF AVAILABLE FOR THE PREACHING OF THE GOOD NEWS.

In other words, Paul made himself available even when it was not convenient—even when things were not just perfect in his life.

- Sometimes it is so tempting for us to think about inviting a friend to worship with us, but then we sometimes want to wait until just the right moment.
- Perhaps we are almost thinking like the young man who is trying to get up the courage to ask a girl out on a date for the very first time.
- Perhaps we are tempted to wait until all of the conditions are perfect.
- We want to make sure we feel good physically.
- We want to make sure that our relationship with this person is just right.
- We may be tempted to wait until we are in the perfect spiritual condition.
- We may be tempted to worry about what we are going to say, how we are to approach this person, and what kind of method we will use if the person wants to know more.
- So maybe we put it off, and put it off, and put it off...

But please think with me about the apostle Paul.

- Here was a man who had just survived a shipwreck. Here was a man who was in chains.
- Here was a man who was awaiting trial before one of the most wicked emperors Rome had ever known. The conditions were not perfect.
- But please notice with me that Paul made himself available to pass along the good news in spite of these many setbacks.

We notice in **verse 16** that, *“Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him.”*

- Why is this significant? It is significant because of what we read in the book of **Philippians**—one of four books that were written during this period of time.
- In **Philippians 1:12-13**, Paul said, *“Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else.”*
- So in one of the books that he writes during the two-year timeframe, the apostle Paul praises God for his imprisonment, because by being chained to so many different soldiers, the *“cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard.”*
- The soldiers of the Roman Praetorian Guard were the elite soldiers who were responsible for personally protecting the emperor of Rome!
- These were the special forces of the Roman army.
- In our own nation, these would have been those soldiers who rode into Afghanistan on horseback in the weeks following September 11, 2001.
- These were the best of the best—the most highly trained soldiers in the Roman army.
- Have you thought about that?
- If Paul had been chained to a different Roman guard every six hours over a period of two years, he would have had the opportunity to share the gospel with 2,920 Roman soldiers—what an amazing ministry!

So here was Paul in his rented apartment—no PowerPoint, no computer, no evangelistic DVD’s, no tracts, no telephone—but he had a captive audience.

- The soldiers might have thought that Paul was the captive, but they would have been mistaken!
- Can you imagine being chained to the apostle Paul?
- Imagine being an elite Roman guard and coming in for your shift of duty, and chaining yourself to this little Jewish man, and maybe you make the mistake of asking, **“So, what brings you here?”**
- Can you imagine how that conversation would have gone and how it would have ended?
- And it is interesting, by the time we get to the end of the book of **Philippians**, Paul says in **Philippians 4:22**, **“All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household.”**
- **“Caesar’s household”** is another way of referring to those praetorian guards—the emperor’s personal soldiers, the “Secret Service” of ancient Rome.
- And so Paul is basically saying, **“Oh, by the way, some of my guards (who are now Christians) wanted me to tell you ‘Hello!’”**
- Imagine baptizing someone you are chained to—how dramatic that would be!
- Paul made himself available to share his faith with the guards!

But moving on to **verse 17**, we find that Paul also made himself available to share his faith with the Jews in Rome.

- Obviously, Paul could not go anywhere, so he calls them together.
- He offers a brief defense, and then he extends an invitation.
- Three days later, they all come together again, and Paul explains the good news.
- What a forgiving spirit! Of all people, Paul could have been so angry at the Jewish people.
- Certain Jewish leaders had followed him from town to town on his missionary journeys.
- They were always right there and ready to falsely accuse and twist the gospel message.
- The Jewish leaders were responsible for making sure that Paul was beaten and stoned and left for dead—over and over again.
- And yet even though Paul could have used this as an excuse to be angry, he did not—he continued making himself available.
- The apostle Paul was motivated by love for his own people.
- As he said roughly five years earlier in the book of **Romans**, **“I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.... Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.”** (Romans 9:1-3; 10:1-2).

As we think about Paul’s attitude here, I hope we can also say the same thing about our friends and loved ones who are still lost in the world.

- Many of them are good, decent people. Many of them are good neighbors.
- In fact, many of them have a zeal for God, many of them go to church, but their zeal is not in accordance with knowledge, and (like the apostle Paul) our heart’s desire and our prayer to God for them is for their salvation.
- The conditions do not always need to be perfect, but (like Paul), we are to be **“unhindered”** in our spreading of the gospel, first of all, by being available with the good news.

II. As we look back to Acts 28, I would also like for us to notice that Paul not only was available, but he was also HOSPITABLE.

Part of Paul’s success in teaching was that he opened his home to those who were willing to learn.

- In **verse 17**, he called people into his home, in **verse 23**, **“they came to him at his lodging in large numbers,”**

- And in **verse 30**, we find that, “...*he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him.*”
- And so we find that the apostle Paul was using his rented apartment as a home base, as a tool, for teaching the word of God to anyone who would listen.
- He had no political connections, not even a printing press or a microphone, but he used his home as a tool for preaching and teaching. He invited people into his home.

I have good friend who went to Freed-Hardeman University and the local church had an “**Adopt-a-Student**” program.

- At the beginning of each school year, those students who were interested could put their name on a piece of paper, and the members of that congregation would then pick a few names out of a hat.
- Those would be their adopted students for the year.
- They had those students over for dinner.
- They had those students over to watch some TV and get away from the dorms.
- They had those students over to do laundry.
- My friend’s adopted family happened to be the minister and his wife.
- This was a church of a thousand people—a huge congregation.
- But about a month into his first semester, my friend came down with the worst case of mono that the doctor down there had ever seen.
- He was lying in bed and seriously had to get up his energy just to walk down the hall to the bathroom. It was that bad.
- But somehow the preacher of that church found out that he was sick.
- There was a knock on his dorm room door, and when he finally made it to the door, the preacher was standing there with a piping hot cooler full of food.
- My friend was so excited that he actually wrote down what was in the cooler—two corn on the cob, two pieces of toast wrapped up in foil, a baked potato, butter and sour cream in their own little foil packets, a plate with roast beef, peas, and mac & cheese, salt and pepper, peanut butter and crackers, toast-em’s (whatever those are—I’m not really sure), a candy bar, a piece of pie on a plate, and even a set of silverware!
- The whole think was piping hot. He set it down in the corner of my friend’s room, he grabbed his huge pile of dirty laundry, and he said, “**I will be back in two hours with your clean laundry and to pick up the dishes.**” That is hospitality!

I am not sure if the apostle Paul ever cooked his guests any roast beef, but he did open his home.

- He had people over, he used his resources, and he used those opportunities for teaching and explaining the word of God. What an amazing example for us to follow!
- Let us use our homes for telling our friends about Jesus!

III. As we look back to Acts 28, there is at least one more lesson here, and that is, the apostle Paul was BIBLICAL.

We need to be available, we need to be hospitable, but we also need to be biblical.

- In **verse 23**, we find that Paul, “...*was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening.*”
- We need to be nice and neighborly and friendly, but at some point we actually need to say something.
- At some point, the conversation absolutely positively has to go back to the Bible.

The apostle Paul went back to the Law of Moses and the prophets, he opened up those prophecies concerning Jesus and the kingdom of God, and he tried to nail it down—he tried to convince them that Jesus is the Son of God, that Jesus is the promised Messiah, and that the church is the kingdom of Christ.

- This is exactly what Jesus Himself did with the two men on the road to Emmaus.
- In **Luke 24:27**, the Bible says, *“Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.”*
- Even Jesus took people back to the word of God!

Our message to our friends and neighbors, then, is not to be our personal opinion.

- Our message is not to be any kind of man-made doctrine.
- Our message is not to be based in any kind of flattering speech, but our message is about Jesus Christ and the fact that Jesus died, He was buried, and he was raised up from the dead.
- Our message is that we need to do something about that sacrifice.
- As Paul said in **Romans 1:16**, this good news is the, *“power of God for salvation.”*

Certainly we understand why Paul wrote what he wrote in **Ephesians 6:18-20**, a passage that was written at some point during this two year period here in **Acts 28**.

- Paul said, *“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”*
- Paul, then, made himself available, he challenged himself to be hospitable, and above everything, he was biblical as he taught the word of God to anyone who might listen.

CONCLUSION & INVITATION:

As we come to the end of this morning’s study, we notice that Paul’s audience comes in united, but as they listen to Paul teaching the word of God, a division starts to take place.

- In **verse 24**, the Bible says that, *“Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe.”*
- In fact, it even got so bad that in **verse 29**, some of the Jews just got up and left because they were having such a *“...great dispute among themselves.”*
- And so it was impossible to stay in the middle.
- It was impossible to be neutral concerning those things that Paul was teaching.

This is exactly what Jesus had predicted in **Luke 12:51-52**, *“Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three.”*

- It is impossible to hear the word of God and simply say, *“Yeah, that’s a nice story.”*
- There is no middle ground. We are being called upon to make a decision.

But from the point of view of our lesson this morning—with the idea of being *“unhindered”* as we tell our friends about Jesus—the idea is that although some may reject the message, others will accept it!

- Going back to the beginning of **verse 24**, *“...some were being persuaded.”*
- And that is our focus here this morning and for our special emphasis on bringing a friend to worship with us next Sunday morning.

And with that, we come to the very end of the book of **Acts**.

- The story is left hanging. We are not told what happens next—it just stops right there.

- And so I would suggest that in at least one sense, the book of **Acts** is an unfinished book.
- What I mean by that is that we as Christians are now living in **Acts 29**.
- We are now living out the continuation of the growth of the early church.
- The book of **Acts** is not over yet.
- Our prayer and our goal is that we will be available, that we will be hospitable, and that we will be biblical as we teach the word of God.

On the other hand, if you have not yet obeyed the gospel, we are inviting you to reconsider it this morning.

- If you have any questions, we would love to study with you as soon as we can get together.
- But on the other hand, if you already know that you are ready to turn away from sin and allow yourself to be buried in water for the forgiveness of your sins, you can let us know about that decision as we sing the next song.
- Let's all stand and sing...