Gospel to the ends of the earth

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Preacher: Andrew Lawrence

[0:00] Well, friends, this is it. It's the beginning of the end.

The final part of our journey through the book of Acts! started almost a year ago, early January this year, as we explored and dug into the book of Acts. And I hope you've loved it and enjoyed it.
I hope it's caused you to want to draw closer to our wonderful Father in Heaven, to God being God in our lives. I hope it's changed our sense of devotion and care for one another as a church.
And I pray it's also inspired us to be more devoted to sharing that good news which we enjoy with those people that God puts around us. I hope, ultimately, we are being drawn to greater devotion to God.
Our greatest desire would be to see His kingdom come in our lives and the life or the lives of everyone we know and care for and love.
[1:22] We're going to finish with reading a passage in Acts 28, starting in verse 11.

It's a continuation of the story which we've been looking at over the last couple of weeks of Paul's, what's called his third missionary journey, where he's been taken to Rome.
And Anthony covered a lot of that last week, maps, which was really helpful in terms of just seeing it. It's a long journey of Paul going to Rome in order to stand trial.
And so we're digging in at verse 11. And this is what Acts 28, verse 11 onwards says. After three months, we put out to sea in a ship that had been wintering on the island, that had wintered in the island.
It was an Alexandrian ship with the fig head of the twin gods, Castor and Pollux. We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. From there, we set sail and arrived at Eregium.
[2:22] The next day, the south wing came up, and on the following day, we reached Puteoli. There we found some brothers and sisters who invited us to spend a week with them.

And so we came to Rome. The brothers and sisters there had heard that we were coming, and they travelled as far as the Forum of Appius and the three taverns to meet us. At the sight of these people, Paul thanked God and was encouraged.
When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself with a soldier to guard him. And three days later, he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them, My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans.
This is the story we have been covering over the last couple of weeks. They examined me and wanted to release me because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar.
I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. Paul, for this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It's because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.
[3:33] Wow. It's because of the hope of Israel, Jesus, that I am bound with this chain. They replied, We have not received any letters from the Judea concerning you.

And none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. But we want to hear what your views are. For we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.
They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God. And from the law of Moses and from the prophets, he tried to persuade them about Jesus.
Some weren't convinced by what he said. Sorry, were convinced by what he said. But others would not believe. They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final

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statement. The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet, Go to this people and say, You will be ever hearing but never understanding.
You will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused. They hardly hear with their ears and they've closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn.
[4:51] And I would heal them. Therefore, I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles and they will listen.

That's a 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.
And so here we are. We come to the end of this account of the early church, the story of the early church. And we're finishing with this third journey of Paul's.
And he gives quite a lot of detail, doesn't he, about when they left and where they went and how many days and all that sort of stuff. I'm not planning on going into massive depth of that.
I just want to make one observation. When he talks about the twin gods on the ship, he said, why does he say that? Of course, we don't know. He doesn't explain it. But I wonder whether he was just wanting to make this observation.
[5:58] I'm not afraid of the gods of the age. I'll travel on any boat. It doesn't matter what it's been dedicated to. I'm dedicated to Jesus. I'm confident in him. I'm okay. I can trust him.

His devotion to God trumps everything. I think there's possibly something in there for some of us here. Then we also get this comment a couple of verses later on, verse 15.
It talks about the love of the believers wanting to encourage Paul. Wow. So we start with his devotion to God where he's not worried about these other gods, these little gods. Then he goes on to the devotion he receives from others, the encouragement he receives from others.
And then we read about this. He makes this comment about for the hope of Israel that I'm bound with these chains.
Wow. Wow. Paul sees his long journey, his imprisonment, as nothing compared to his desire to help everyone come to know Jesus.
[7:08] Isn't that amazing? Yeah. It's a very, very tough journey he's had. He's been shipwrecked. And in one sense, all for nothing because he doesn't deserve to be there.

But rather than railing against that, he's going, hey, this is all just for the hope of Israel. I'm in these chains. He's got God's big picture perspective.
I think sometimes we can feel bound by our circumstances. Feel, oh, if it was only not for this. If only that was different. I think we need to recognize that very often God uses our circumstances. He takes us on a journey through our circumstances. And he still creates opportunities for both him to be glorified and for people to come to know him.
And maybe that's where you are today. Maybe you're feeling a bit of that going on. You're asking those questions. God, what are you doing in my circumstances? It's been tough.
[8:10] It's been going on for quite some time. Paul, years, if you include his imprisonment in the house in Rome. Many years. Maybe God wants to give us a perspective shift on them.

Say, look what I can do through these. Will you journey with me? Will you allow me to change your heart? Will you allow me to demonstrate my grace through you to the people that are maybe even causing this trouble?
Paul certainly seems to have kept focus on what he's called to do. Ultimately, to help people meet Jesus. Verse 24. We read, some were persuaded.
Both Jewish leaders and everyone else who came to him. Some were persuaded about this gospel he was sharing. This good news he was sharing. He did it with everything he had.
Verse 23. He explained and declared to them the kingdom of God. His heart for the Gentiles. And in verse 30, boldly and without hindrance, he preaches. Or 29. Boldly, he preaches and preached the good news of the kingdom of God.
[9:15] And taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. He was not afraid to use his circumstances to engage with God, to know God, and to then declare who God was to those people that God had put around him.

He also wasn't afraid, though, to warn the people that he was with about what was going to come. To speak using that quote from Isaiah chapter 6, verses 9 and 10.

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And I want to give a bit of time on that. It's interesting how salvation has been sent to the Gentiles and they will listen. Well, Gentiles were the people who weren't Jews. So most of us in this room would come under that category.
And I guess I want to ask the question, will we listen? And that's where I'd like to give a big part of our, or the remainder of our time together this morning. Just understanding this and thinking about, am I listening?
Do I listen to the gospel? Do I listen to Jesus? Do I allow him to control, shape, define my thinking? Is he really Lord? Now this morning, which he reads from Isaiah, says this.
[10:29] Go to this people and say, you will be ever hearing but never understanding. Hmm. Interesting, isn't it? Ever hearing, never understanding. In other words, sort of having a bit deaf ears really.

Not seeing, not getting the big picture about God. You'll be ever seeing but never perceiving. He's saying a similar thing basically.
Your eyes are not going to see the truth of Jesus. You aren't seeing the truth of Jesus, of who he is. God's son, saviour of the world. Why?
Because these people, their hearts have become calloused. What? Hardened. Do you ever get calluses on your hands, perhaps from what you do in your day job?
Hard skin. I'm one of these people who fidgets and tries to get rid of it. Those calluses. Those calluses. Our hearts have become hardened.
[11:30] And if you're careful, our hearts become hardened. They hardly hear with their ears and they've closed their eyes. But you're not going to see anything if you've closed your eyes, are you?

It's like a choice has been made. I'm going to close my eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn.
That is, and turn as in repent. Because the gospel we have is a gospel of repentance. Saying, Jesus is God and I'm not.
I've got a loving Father in heaven who's holy. And I can't reach him. But he's reached down and touched my life. And he's pulled me out of the sin and mire, because Jesus has died for my sin. That I can know the Father in heaven. The maker and creator and sustainer of the heavens and the earth. And I wonder whether we sometimes haven't heard.
[12:37] We haven't seen. We haven't listened. And we've parked Jesus to one side. Yeah, I'm saved. But I don't want to give him anything more.

Is he really Lord? Is he really in control? Now, I've completely messed up my PowerPoint.
So I'm just going to click a load of clicks and we'll catch up. God's people. We are God's people. We're called to have seeing eyes. Hearing ears. And a heart understanding.
A heart which is tender to God. Therefore, we become surrendered to him in our entirety.
Not just the bits we can't control, but the bits we can control. Have we surrendered ourselves completely to him, recognizing he really is God of the entirety of our lives?
[13:39] Do we give ourselves to encountering? Are we giving our time, our energy, our focus, our attention to him?

To enjoying him, to knowing him, to serving him and his people? Our lives.
Are they dedicated to proclaiming him and see his kingdom come? Is that the big picture of my life? Is that what I'm giving my life for? Or is there a different God in play here? A big dream. A dream which perhaps God doesn't get much of a look in on.
A goal. Well, I want to do this. If I do this, I'm probably going to not follow what Jesus is saying. What's it going to be? The thing is, we can only do this also in the power of God's Holy Spirit.
[14:44] We need his Spirit in us. He comes in us as we're saved, but we mustn't stop there. We need to be regularly filled with his Spirit. Go on being filled with his Spirit. Who draws us to the grace of God.

Who gives us the power of God to live life for his glory and honour. To make those decisions. To make those choices. I'm not going to do this. I'm going to go God's way.
I'm not going to follow that temptation. I'm going to pursue God's agenda. That warning that's taken from Isaiah is a warning for us today too.
What are we going to be like? How are we going to live our lives? What choices are we going to make? Are we going to be a people, ultimately, who are devoted? Devoted to God.

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Devoted to each other. Devoted to mission. Because we don't just stop in our devotion to God and go, Well, I just love God so much. I haven't got time for anybody else. I haven't got time for mission. No, no.
[15:47] The very essence of being devoted to God means it will take us to loving each other well. Loving our neighbour as ourselves. As Jesus said, which includes mission.

We are called to take the truth of the gospel. To demonstrate the truth of the gospel to those that God's put us around. Or puts around us.
Our neighbours, our friends, our work colleagues. How are we going to respond? How are we going to respond? At the end of the book of Acts, we see how one man's responded.
Paul. We've watched his journey. We've watched his journey from salvation right the way through to ending up in chains. Whatever that quite looked like. In a house in Rome.
Waiting his trial. Are we prepared to do that sort of journey? Go where God says.
[16:55] As he directs. To stand out for him. To give ourselves to him. I'd love us to pause for a moment.

And reflect on that. You may want to close your eyes. That may be helpful. You don't need to if you don't want to. But you may want to ask yourself a question. Where am I, Lord, with this? What's my devotion really look like to you?
Please, I'm not trying to. I don't want anyone to beat themselves up unnecessarily. Not into that. But at the same point in time, we do need to have a sober assessment of where we stand.
For some of us, even today, you may be here. And you've been gazing in on Christians. And experiencing our times like this together.
But you know you're not yet there. And Jesus is knocking on the door and saying, Hey, you going to let me in? Is it time? Are you going to let me in?
[18:02] Are you going to make that decision? Are you going to surrender yourself completely? Have you come to the end of yourself yet? Will you recognize you cannot save yourself? But Jesus has died to save you.

And you can pray that prayer today. God, I'm not sure I fully understand all this. Join the club. But I know that Jesus has died for my sin. And I know that I stand before the Father in Heaven as a sinner.
And I will be condemned to eternal separation from Him without Jesus. And I want to recognize that Jesus is my God. That He died for my sin to restore me to a relationship with the Father in Heaven. And I want to take hold of that. By faith, I want to make that decision today. If that's you, I'd encourage you. Make that decision. You can use words like that. Jesus, I want you to be boss of my life.
I want you to be Lord of my life. But for many of us, we've made that decision. But we may have reneged on it in one way or another.
[19:15] We may have compromised it. And now's an opportunity to go, actually, God, I do want to be completely devoted to you. I do want to give myself to you.

And so we're going to be quiet now. Or I'm going to be quiet now. Let's take this opportunity to respond. Let's do this. Thank you.
Thank you.
Thank you. And we say we're grateful. We are so grateful. Look, in Jesus, through your death and resurrection, we get to become children of God.
Where we repent and turn away from our sin, our ways, and say, hey, we want you to be Lord over our lives. We want you to be our saviour over our lives. Help us to live that out day by day.
[21:00] It wouldn't just be a one-off decision and it doesn't change everything else. We want you to cause us to grow in our devotion to you, Lord.

Lord, in loving each other, our devotion to loving each other and to global mission. That you will be glorified more and more in and through our lives as we give ourselves to you.
Help us to do that today, Lord. Help us to keep on doing that day by day in the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.
Amen. I'm just going to...

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