

# Kingdom Welcome

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Acts 28:28-31

There are questions as to why the great Book of Acts ends as it does; or worse, why it doesn't end in some other way.

People have supposed Luke was interrupted in his writing, perhaps even by his death. Others wonder if Luke intended a third book to bring forth the end of the Apostle Paul and the great trials to come upon the church. Some have even said the original conclusion was lost.

These are all of them speculations spun from silence. And sadly they miss two major facts right under our nose.

1<sup>st</sup>, the Book of Acts is not a biography of Paul. If it is a biography at all, it is of the life of the Gospel, the Word of grace, the Word of the Kingdom, the Word of the risen Christ, as it grows, moves, changes, and spreads all the way from the holy city of the Jews, to the eternal city of the Gentiles – the city of Rome. Paul's arrival in the Imperial Capital is the finish line, and this is a most appropriate close to Acts 1:8 – to the uttermost parts of the earth.

2<sup>nd</sup>, the Book of Acts is not even about the servants of the Lord or the churches founded and established, as much as it is about Jesus and what HE continued to do and to teach after his ascension. If this is a cutting short; if there is a cliff or a bridge that ends mid-way, it should be seen as a ramp for us to press on from here. For Christ continues to work in us.

Acts ends, not with a good-bye, but a hello, a welcome, as Paul receives any and all to his rented place, awaiting trial. The gospel call echoes forward from the living Christ to every generation, and to us, who build their life and eternity upon the Rock of Jesus.

We have three points under this Kingdom Welcome, found in the last three verses.

But before them, we need to know that most believe verse 29, found only in some manuscripts, should not be included. Most believe a well-intentioned copyist added here to bridge from 28 to 30.

Look with me first to verse 28 and the **Kingdom Welcome of Hope**.

The Kingdom Warnings of last time, with the Kingdom Hardening of the Jews, does not and cannot stop the Kingdom Hope of the Gentiles. [Read the verse.]

This begins with a solemn declaration by the Apostle – “Let it be known”. This is a phrase of significant importance.

This salvation of God – literally, the “saving which is God’s” – the whole plan, purpose and way in which He rescues through His Son, is intended here.

Then look at those three little words: “has been sent”, is once for all event, and is even now in motion. How has His saving been sent to the Gentiles? When? By whom? Why? Look back to Acts 26:22-23.

<sup>22</sup> *"So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; <sup>23</sup> that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."* (Act 26:22-23)

Jesus' death tore down the wall between Jew and Gentile. The ordinances of the OT which kept Israel a separate nation have been dissolved in the cross, and their purpose completed. Jesus arises from the tomb the Savior of the whole World – and that truth is now sent to that world of fallen men. Think of John 3:16.

But the last phrase is what serves as the umbrella, the canopy, for the rest of the message – “they will also listen.” They will not merely hear it or be more open than the Jews, to listen in the lower sense of the word. No, this is the higher sense – they will heed its message, they will respond to it, they will embrace it.

In fact, this is exact same note which Luke sounded at the beginning of his gospel – when Jesus entered as light of the world.

Luke refers to *Jesus reigning on the throne of his father David, which will know no end; Simeon departs with that his eyes have seen God's salvation - a light of revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel; and John cries out in the wilderness that all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*

This saving of God – divinely sent, divinely wise, divinely gracious, is divinely effectual.

This does not mean every Gentile will come, any more than kingdom hardening meant every Jew will reject Jesus.

But in this line of God's promise and purpose, there in the great hub for all the world – where Britain and India, Europe and Africa all meet – we find the apostle's hope, the apostle's confidence.

He is saying: “Do with me as you will! Confine me! Cast me away in the deepest dungeon! The Word of God cannot be bound!” Long ago Isaiah recorded: “So will my word be which will go forth from My mouth, it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing all that I desire!” And who speaks these words? If not the king of heaven and earth, the Lord Jesus Christ, who rules over all in the earth.

The time of the Gentiles has come, when they will embrace the hope offered to Israel. And we – seated nearly 2000 years later – have we not seen that hope justified?

The Father will have the marriage supper of His Son packed with those called from the highways and by-ways; and he will provide for them all their wedding clothes; even as the Jews say, “No thanks”.

In this they show they are out of step with the great promise made to Abraham, OUR father – that blessings to all the nations would come through him.

This is our confidence and hope in our generation as well, that as we tell others the glad tidings of great joy, that those who have been ordained to eternal life will believe; that the Lord has many people in this city, we are not be discouraged by whatever rejection or opposition we may face.

It is the Lord who sovereignly calls; He says, “Blessed is the man He chooses and causes to approach unto Him.” Ps. 65:4

And this is – as Stott observes – what is behind Paul’s prison epistles. He writes: “The Prison letters breath an atmosphere of joy, peace, patience and contentment,” why? “because he believed in the sovereignty of God.”

We will come back to another quality here in our last point, but now let us move forward to verse 30 – from the kingdom welcome of hope to **the kingdom welcome of hospitality**. He is in chains, yet he invites people to in. He is on trial for his life, yet he invites people in. His accommodations were likely meager, yet he invites people in. He is growing old and feeble, yet he invites people in.

He refers to himself at this time as Paul the aged. Here in this little verse is a sermon all its own – to those with lesser means, to those who are shut-ins, to those who are past their prime, as they say. Paul is ready, in season and out of season. Unable to move about, does he give up and set aside his ministerial call? No! And his flexibility bore great fruit by God.

He has a ministry to the Guards, as they take turns guarding the prisoner, and the gospel comes into the household of Caesar.

The run-away slave, Onesimus, is begotten as a child of God by Paul in his imprisonment, and is sent back to his master, to Philemon.

Listen to Paul's testimony in Philippians 1:

*<sup>12</sup> Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, <sup>13</sup> so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, <sup>14</sup> and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. ... with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. <sup>21</sup> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

Learn this very simple principle from the Word – the Lord will not hold you accountable for what you **don't** have, but what you **do** have; so use it, or lose it! How many of us say to ourselves, “I would really serve the Lord fully if \_\_\_\_\_, (fill in the blank); if I had more freedom, if I had a better place, if I were younger, if I were older, if I were wealthier, etc, etc.”

These are the wiles of the devil himself, to talk us out of trusting confidently in the Lord for the results.

And listen – this is a group effort. How many brought friends with them to Paul's place? Maybe you don't feel competent to share the Word or teach others the Bible, but you can host a Bible study and reach out through another who is.

This is all part of your love for others. Do you love your neighbor as yourself? Then: <sup>10</sup> *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;* <sup>11</sup> *not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;* <sup>12</sup> *rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,* <sup>13</sup> *contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.* (Rom 12:10-13)

And why would you be so loving and hospitable to others? If not because the Lord has been so loving and hospitable to you? Has he not granted you a part in his forever family, His household? Called you sons and daughters? He has welcomed you to his hearth, his table, his eternal home. Let our hearts do the same, and respond in kind. We were lost and outside once too.

Kingdom Welcome of Hospitality, under the roof of the Kingdom Welcome of Hope, is concluded in 31 with the Kingdom Welcome of the Herald of Heaven.

Behind the open door of this place is the open heart and open lips of one who bears a heavenly message. Read vs. 31.

We taught on this more fully in 23-24 – Kingdom Persuasion. A Message based on the Bible, God’s Word; the Manner of solemnly and seriously testifying and persuading people.

Now, of course, not all are called to preach or teach authoritatively in the church. But all are assigned to witness to the grace of God in their lives.

The herald declares – not himself – but the King, the Savior, and His everlasting Rule and Dominion.

There are many who would have a kingdom without the Lord Jesus; they say, “My kingdom come, My will be done.”

And there are also many who would have a Jesus without a Kingdom, without His Lordship over the church, without His purpose for the nations.

One of the most important lessons from this verse is that the Kingdom is real. We don’t make the kingdom or bring in the kingdom as much as we manifest His rule and reign that exists already and has already come. This world already belongs to Christ. The kingdom of God in King Jesus has come!

We mentioned Paul’s attitude in the Prison Epistles being one of hope and confidence. Why is that? We find in him a glorious quality in his faith – the magnificence of the cosmic Christ – Christ over the universe.

Remember Philippians 2 – every knee shall bow to him and confess His Lordship? How about Ephesians 1, 3, and 4? The conqueror, better than Caesar, dragging his prizes behind his chariot, not as he rolls into Rome, but into heaven, leading all things captive. He has

come not to enslave but to free. Paul and you serve a Christ who is seated in the highest heavenlies, far above all rule, authority, power and dominion, in this age and the next, and all things – did I say all things? – yes **all things** are put in subjection under his feet, and He is given as head over all things, specially, uniquely to His Church. The Father is summing up all things in Christ – things in heaven and things on earth.

And Colossians is most powerful of all: <sup>19</sup> *For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,* <sup>20</sup> *and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. (Col 1:19-20)*

<sup>8</sup> *See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.* <sup>9</sup> *For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,* <sup>10</sup> *and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; (Col 2:8-10)*

*He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through [the cross]. (Col 2:15)*

*Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.* <sup>2</sup> *Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.* <sup>3</sup> *For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.* <sup>4</sup> *When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Col 3:1-4)*

*Christ is all, and in all. (Col 3:11)*



*<sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. (Col 3:23-24)*

Do you serve a big Savior and Lord like this? Is your Jesus too small? Are you too big?

Is our sharing the gospel, our heralding heaven, matching with this message?

Some in the past have thought that such a message should be supported by the government, and brought about by laws and the sword.

But the weapons of this kingdom are not of this world either; they are not carnal. It is by preaching, teaching, persuading, testifying, that hearts are moved. The Lord was not in the hurricane, the earthquake, or the fire, but in the still small voice which whispers, Salvation! Life! Peace! Will you have peace? Peace with God through the Prince of Peace? Yes, the Bible and God's people take aim at every square inch of life, of all things being brought beneath the feet of the Savior. But we do not look to the government to support the gospel or the church or the ministry.

The last word there, "unhindered", is a legal term, meaning there no official obstacles or restraints upon the teaching and preaching.

"This emphatic adverb," says Thomas Peck, "expresses exactly the relation which the civil power ought to sustain to the church: "Hands off!" All the [support] which the ministers of religion need from the state and all that they ought to desire, is to be left alone, not hindered in their work."

There is a race being run unlike any other in this racetrack called time. It is a race for heaven. And woe be to anyone who puts a stumbling

block before the feet of even the smallest of these immortal souls! The Lord of all has warned that it would be better to have a millstone tied around your neck and to be cast into the middle of the sea, than to cause a little one to stumble in this mission.

So it is by powerful preaching and teaching, testifying and persuading, that the kingdom goes forward. These are our guns, our bombs, our tanks, our weapons of our warfare. Not by might, nor by power, nor by riches, but by Your Spirit.

And the best setting for this is for the Christian to be unhindered, unimpeded in their spiritual pursuits. This is why we are to pray, says Paul, in 1 Timothy 2, for all kinds of men, especially those in authority, that we might lead a quiet, tranquil life, pursuing godliness in all things, in the service of the gospel.

And what are we seeking to protect here? It is this word ‘openness’ that must be kept unhindered.

There is no English equivalent for this word, as it includes the ingredients of confidence, boldness, as well as being open and free with the truth. It is opposite not only to timidity and reserve, but to an incomplete or obscure exhibition of the truth, says JA Alexander.

Unleash the full, free, bold, confident, clear Word of the Gospel, the Word of the King of grace and of glory, and you will see – as you saw in the early church – as you saw in the great Reformation – as you have seen in every true revival, as in this once-blessed land – the power of God unto salvation.

That, to me, and I hope to you as well, is the example and instruction and end of the Acts.

It does not matter whether Paul’s case was heard or dismissed after two years. It does not matter whether he was acquitted, or condemned and died. What matters is will we continue the story of the growth of

His kingdom Word, the spread of the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the world. What matters is if we are open – glad to share, as one beggar to another, where to find this heavenly manna, this feast for the soul, this very bread of life come down to us?

Whether Paul went to Spain and other points, as early church history has some record of, or not; this is not the concern here. The concern however is: did you go? Did you bring His testimony to Little Saigon, to China, to Compton, to the Philippines?

And if you do not go yourself, your support and your prayers go, don't they? Oh what a full calling is set before us today! Let us close with what our prayer agenda should be as we come before a Sovereign King of kings, and Lord of lords.

How does the hymn go? Newton wrote:

*You are coming to a king; large petitions with you bring;  
For His grace and power are such; none can ever ask too much!*

Here is how our Presbyterian forefathers laid it out from the Bible:

*Westminster Larger Catechism 191: What do we pray for in the second petition?*

*A. In the second petition (which is, Thy kingdom come,) acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, the Jews called, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in; the church furnished with all gospel-officers and ordinances, purged from corruption, countenanced and maintained by the civil magistrate: that the ordinances of Christ may be purely dispensed, and made effectual to the converting of those that are yet in their sins, and the confirming, comforting, and building up of those that are already converted: that*

*Christ would rule in our hearts here, and hasten the time of his second coming, and our reigning with him forever: and that he would be pleased so to exercise the kingdom of his power in all the world, as may best conduce to these ends.*