

Scripture Introduction: Why are we reading from the Bible? I can't just tell you what God wants you to hear today from my own ideas. I have been thinking about you for weeks, brothers and sisters. I have been praying for you. But I don't know what you need to hear this morning. The Lord has not spoken audibly to me. The Lord has not given me a vision or a dream that was obviously directly from him. He never has. Yet the Lord desires to commune with His people. He deigns to speak to them. How does he do that? Through his Holy Word proclaimed. This is why I will be expounding to you a book written almost two thousand years ago. Because it is God's word and it is living and active.

Why are we reading from this scripture? Brothers and Sisters, you are listening to the preaching of God's word from the book of Romans therefore I thought it would be helpful to hear about what happened when Paul, the author of Romans, finally traveled to Rome. Perhaps you know the book of Romans already and understand how carefully Paul lays out the teachings of the church, the glories of the gospel in his letter to the Romans. Paul also addresses some of them by name, he is familiar with some of the brothers and sisters in Rome before he even pens his letter to them.

As we read Acts 28, the story of Paul finally arriving in Rome, keep in mind Romans 1:16 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ, for it is the power of salvation, for all who believe, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." As he gets to Rome, you really see Paul preaching the gospel first to the Jews. Paul is an apostle to the Gentiles, he is in the heart of pagan Rome, he has been sent there because the Jews arrested him and who does he first honor with the gospel message...the Jews, whom he calls brothers. This truth is mostly of mere redemptive historical significance but if we were to draw an application from it I would venture this: preach to your own people first.

Before we read Acts 28, you must also know that we have historical record that prior to Paul's visit to Rome there had been a Roman persecution of Jews due to a conflict over a Crestus. Now if we take this to be a misunderstanding of Kristus then it appears that there has already been a significant following after Jesus in Rome and it has caused significant debate involving the Jews who are there. This

means that proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ to Jews was lethally controversial.

Prayer of Illumination:

Scripture Reading: Acts 28:11-31

Introduction: There are a lot of myths about pregnancy. Some say that if a woman carries her baby high, it will be a boy, if she carries her baby low, it will be a girl. Some say if Dad gains "sympathy" weight during a pregnancy the baby is going to be a girl. Some myths sound more scientific: if the baby's heart rate is high it will be a girl, low a boy. Sometimes these myths seem to bear truth. Let's say a woman had three pregnancies and in her first two the infant's heart rate in the womb was lower, in the 130s, and in each case the baby turned out to be a boy. And in her third pregnancy the baby's heart rates tended more toward the 160s and the baby turned out to be a girl. That would seem to prove the theory. But scientific evidence has shown that none of these factors indicates a baby's gender.

We're talking about how a baby grows, but now let's talk about how a church grows. There are lots of myths associated with church growth as well. And just as with the old wives tales regarding pregnancy sometimes the results seem to prove church growth practices to be true. We must look to the Bible to see whether church growth practices are truth or myth.

There is a prevailing myth present in our American Christian subculture today. It's this: IF we make the message more easy to hear, more people will become Christians. If we shorten the sermons, make them more topical, take out sin and hell, throw in a few more stories, videos or dramas we will fill the building and get ready to build another. These myths are based in the reality that many people do come to hear their consciences eased and to tingle their ears with the kind of thing they wanted to hear anyway. So when several churches fill up with this strategy it's tempting to think that it works, that it's truth, that real church growth is happening.

We're not going to debunk that myth today. In order to do so we would need to see into the hearts of people all over the U.S. attending churches with said strategy. We can't do that. But what we can do, is look into the scripture. The scripture before us today presents us with what seem to be several hindrances to church growth. And we will see that none of these problems really hinder church growth therefore, much lesser things like doctrine, fortitude, and hard truth will not hinder church growth either.

Church growth according to the book of Acts consists of the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ being proclaimed, repentance and baptism, receiving the Holy Spirit, and radical sharing of resources in the new covenant community.

Proposition: If we boldly proclaim the kingdom of Jesus, the gospel will go forth without hindrance.

That begs two questions: what is the kingdom of Jesus and how do we proclaim it?

What is the kingdom of Jesus? The kingdom of Jesus is the reign and rule of a new heavenly king. It is not merely about salvation. It is about having your primary citizenship in a monarchy that is not of this world. That means obeying spiritual laws, just as you would obey the physical laws of this land. It means submitting to the government of the new kingdom and the Lord has given the keys of the church to faithful leaders that you have here among you. The kingdom of Jesus is personally setting your life under God's protection and rule.

How do we boldly proclaim it? There are many ways we can't follow Paul's example but one way we can is by being welcoming, into our homes. Welcome friends and neighbors into your home. Welcome them also into your church. And if you are in the regular habit of proclaiming the kingdom in your home and in your church, they will hear it. We boldly proclaim the kingdom by having courage to say and do the hard things at home and at work. If we have determined that we will not care about what others think of us so much as we care about what the Lord thinks of us, we will share with boldness the gospel when the time comes. If

we have determined that the Lord is able to provide for us no matter what, we will be unafraid to have boldness in the workplace, refusing to do wickedness, or speak falsehood.

Let's dig into our text to figure out what we're supposed to understand from Acts 28. And as we do we'll dispel 10 myths about church growth or gospel proclamation.

In 28:11 we pick up with Paul traveling in a boat to Rome. Paul has longed to go to Rome to be with the brothers in the faith that he wrote his letter to, which you are studying. But he is going to Rome under different auspices than he would have chosen himself. He's going as a prisoner. In one sense you could very much think of Paul as a missionary to Rome, he is an ordained authority in the church going there on a mission to the Gentiles. But in another sense, he's just a business man running in to trouble as he goes about his business. But Paul doesn't seem to complain about it, even though he knew of the danger he chose to go to Jerusalem where he was arrested under false pretences. Some Jews from Asia minor had come to Jerusalem, they recognized Paul as the one who had been preaching Jesus in the synagogues in Asia, they had seen Paul entering the city with a Gentile, then later they saw him in the temple. So they assumed Paul was bringing Gentiles into the temple. He wasn't. But when you disagree with someone sometimes any excuse will do to accuse them of wrongdoing. It's a long story but Paul appeals to Caesar to get justice since the Jews aren't giving it to him. So the Roman governor sends him to Rome. Throughout Paul's journey he's proclaiming the gospel. He's dragged in front of magistrate after magistrate and he keeps asking to tell his story, the story of the gospel, and folks want to listen to him. Jews and Gentiles.

Paul's example disproves a myth that many subscribe to in practice:

Myth 1: The kingdom is proclaimed once you get where you're going. Paul doesn't act as if he should wait to get where he's going to proclaim the wonderful news of Jesus Christ. Neither should we. Whether you're in college, in training, on a business trip, at a restaurant on the way, in jail, or perhaps you're just in a situation you can't wait to get out of. Wherever you are, on your way, proclaim

the gospel, right where you are. Ask for permission if you need to and then tell of the Lordship of Jesus in a way appropriate to the situation.

vs 14,15 Wherever Paul goes he finds the brothers. This brings us to a subtle theme in our text today. Brothers, siblings. It's interesting that Luke mentions the figurehead of the ship Paul sailed on, it had the brothers Castor and Pollux. Then when he gets to Puteoli he finds the "brothers." Then when he gets close to Rome the "brothers" come out to meet him. Then later he addresses the leaders of the Jews as brothers, and later still they say that they haven't heard from their brothers concerning Paul. Luke even includes the strange detail that the ship Paul sailed in on had, as its figurehead, the gemini. Sometimes called the twins. The funny thing about the Gemini is that according to Greek mythology they were only half brothers. One the son of the Spartan king, the other the son of Zeus, a God. The reason I make mention of this is because throughout this passage there is a tension. Who are Paul's real brothers, the Jews or the Gentile believers? The sons of God or the sons according to the flesh. Which one is which? Well, notice the difference in how the different types of brothers treat Paul.

The Christian brothers of Puteoli invite him to stay with them a week. The Christian brothers in Rome travel very far to welcome him to Rome. The Jews on the other hand, his brothers according to the flesh, sent him in chains to Rome. They could only say "we have received no letters about you." Who are Paul's true brothers? The brothers in the Lord.

Which begs a question: Who are your true brothers? Who do you consider above all else to be your deepest friends, those who really get you and who will really be there for you in a tough spot? Is it your family according to the flesh or your family according to the spirit? Is it your club you belong to or your church you've covenanted yourself to? The answer to that question reveals your heart and whether you're citizenship is in the kingdom of this world or the next.

(Here is an example of what will happen at the so called Rapture.)

Verse 16: Under house arrest.

Myth 2: The kingdom must be proclaimed from a pulpit.

Paul did not have a pulpit. Paul did not have a church building. Paul was not even allowed to go to the synagogue or the forum. Paul had a house and a voice and so he proclaimed the kingdom, not from a pulpit, but from house arrest. Can the gospel go forth without hindrance from such a situation? Yes.

But think about how we would treat such a situation today. Let's say a faithful Christian was awaiting trial for asylum in D.C. They weren't allowed to leave their embassy. Honestly, would we think that there was a situation where the gospel would go forth unhindered? No, we would think, you need a church planter with no criminal record, you need a building, some funds from a rich benefactor, a twitter feed, about 1,000 friends on facebook and then it would look like the gospel was going forth unhindered.

We've got all sorts of ways we think that a city could be reached, should be reached. But the idea that the kingdom must be proclaimed from a pulpit is a myth.

What does that mean for us? It means that you can proclaim the gospel from your house, in your house and it will actually do something, it will be an example of the gospel going forth unhindered. Proclaim the kingdom to your spouse, to your children, to your friends, visitors, relations, neighbors in your house, invite them over, share the story of God's grace to you, you don't need a pulpit.

verse 17

The Christians of Rome had already come out to meet Paul on the road, so after 3 days in Rome Paul invites the Jewish leaders over to his house. The first thing he does is transgress Myth no. 3.

Myth 3: If you accuse your audience's culture of wrongdoing, they won't come back.

Paul says to the Jews, your people arrested me and objected to my release for no good reason. We would think that the Jews wouldn't want to hear anymore from Paul after he'd denigrated their culture. Paul is accusing the Jewish people of sin. Later he'll directly accuse those who reject the gospel of sin. American Christianity

generally thinks that strategy is a bad idea, mean-spirited, intolerant. It's no way to grow the church according to Evangelicals. If, in kingdom proclamation you accuse people of sin, they won't come back.

Such a myth has even crept into PCA churches. I don't know if your elders ever accuse people of sinning, directly or indirectly. If they did, if they do, it is not foreign to kingdom proclamation. Beware the policy, that some churches, even PCA churches, in our area have: that you never accuse anyone of sin.

Paul has boldness to proclaim the truth even when it might hurt someone's feelings. Do you have the same boldness? God can and does use that boldness for the spread of his kingdom.

Verse 22 The Jews themselves dispense with Myth number 4.

Myth 4: Nonbelievers don't desire to know what your views about Christianity are.

Even though Paul had told them about how their culture had wronged him. Even though they didn't know him, they wanted to hear what his views were on Christianity which they called a sect. This is in opposition to how many Christians think church growth happens today. There's an old saying in Young Life Ministry regarding evangelism (They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.) But the Acts of the Apostles doesn't bear this out. More than once people repent and believe even when they don't know how much the proclaimer cares. This coincides with another myth regularly spoken in Christian circles with regard to Evangelism, "You've got to earn the right to be heard." That sounds like truth. In our everyday lives we don't just listen to anyone who's speaking, we only really listen to a few. How do we determine who we listen to? We only listen to those who we care about or to those whose message sounds like the truth. The myth that "you've got to earn the right to be heard" implies that one must show other acts of love and kindness in order to get a hearing for your message. That's one way. The other way to get a hearing for your message is to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So in a sense we

can agree with "you've got to earn the right to be heard." But what we mean is that speaking the truth of the gospel, earns you the right to be heard.

In application, don't assume nonbelievers aren't interested in the kingdom of Jesus. Ask them if they're interested in hearing about it. You could say "Would you like to hear something about Jesus? Can I tell you some good news?" They might be very interested. Even people who already have a religion. Many of you had religion when you heard the good news of Jesus for the first time right? Weren't your ears itching to hear more? Well, that may be the case with your associates? Especially if you invite them over to your home.

Verse 20

Myth 5: You have to tell people the whole gospel immediately if you get a chance to have a spiritual conversation.

Have you ever been "ambush evangelized?" I have. I drove a long way into D.C. to meet with a brother in Christ to talk about the things of God. As we were meeting at the McDonald's a fellow comes up to us and wants to have a spiritual conversation with us. Well, it seemed that way. What he really wanted to do was preach to us that we should be converted. We tried to explain that we were Christians that were meeting for discipleship purposes. But he was intent on giving his gospel presentation.

Sometimes well meaning Christians are tempted to do this with unbelieving family. The Lord may indeed be laying it on your heart to do so. But it's also okay to trust in the sovereignty of God and tell them a little and entice them to have a longer or deeper conversation when they're interested to hear.

Paul says "because of the hope of Israel I am wearing this chain." He's being cryptic with the Jewish leaders. He's not telling them the whole story. He's speaking with words that please the ears of his audience but he's not telling them that he thinks Jesus is the hope of Israel. He's being sneaky. He's giving a teaser for his future talk. Have you ever watched a teaser or a trailer for a movie. They tell you or show you something that's pleasing to you, that intrigues you, but they don't tell you the whole story. Paul is doing the same thing here. This strategy

may be properly employed in kingdom proclamation both from the pulpit and in personal conversation. Speak in such a way that initially intrigues the hearer.

Part of my testimony is that my friends down the street from me growing up as a boy, invited me over to a bible study at their house. What it turned out to be was a very pointed Bible study where I was convicted and confronted about my sin. I prayed to accept Christ that night, January 13th, 1992. They were sneaky, but not false. They didn't ask me to come over and play video games and then bust a bible study throw down on me. They intrigued me with the Bible study, but there was more there than I was bargaining for.

Verse 23a

Myth 6: You need a big meeting hall to proclaim the kingdom.

They came to him in greater numbers. Paul was under house arrest. In general houses were not very big in those days. A large house is especially unlikely given the fact that, according to verse 30 Paul lived there two whole years at his own expense. The smallness of the space does not hinder kingdom proclamation. Even if all you have is single bedroom in a college dorm, it is enough space for the gospel to be proclaimed. The space isn't what's hindering the gospel going forth, it's our own attitude towards what God has given that hinders the spread of the gospel.

How easy would it have been for Paul to complain to the Lord that house arrest hindered gospel proclamation. Paul had spoken in city squares, in forums, in synagogues before to great effect. But now he's confined to a house, falsely accused. He has great excuse to complain to the Lord about this and withhold kingdom proclamation until he gets his way. But he doesn't. How much less do we have an excuse not to use our homes for kingdom proclamation.

If you say, "Who would want to come over to my house to hear us tell about the kingdom of Jesus?" Who indeed? Why don't you ask some folks to come over? At the very least begin with the folks who already live at your house. Proclaim the gospel to them. Have family worship with them as often as possible.

As we speak, our brothers and sisters on the other side of the globe in Jakarta Indonesia are having their church walls torn down. They had been meeting in houses, but now there are 600 of them. They'd like to get together for worship every once in awhile. So they got the 60 signatures of non-Christian neighbors that they needed in order to buy a site and start construction. No sooner had they started construction then Muslims started protesting at the site. The officials declared the 60 signatures fraudulent and proceeded to tear down the walls already in place at the site. This was reported on April 1st. This appears to be a hindrance to the gospel. But God's word will go forth. Their testimony will spread. Even now you're hearing about your Christian brothers and sisters in Jakarta. Take courage from their example. Pray for them. And take full advantage of all the blessings you've been given here.

Myth 7: You have to proclaim the kingdom briefly.

Verse 23b From morning till evening. These are the unconverted mind you. All day he preached and testified to them. The length of the sermon is not a hindrance to the gospel. It's quite the opposite it is the very example of the gospel going forth without hindrance.

Yet, in our day, many evangelicals think the truth must be proclaimed briefly if it is to get a hearing. 30 minutes is thought far too long to appeal to nonbelievers. Well, these nonbelievers sat all day and listened. Maybe it isn't the length of time that needs to be shortened but the quality of the message that needs to be improved. 30 minutes is too long for me to endure under false teaching, under empty teaching, under teaching that largely consists of a preachers own thoughts and philosophical musings. But 30 minutes is far too brief if I'm being fed by the very meat of God's word. If indeed God's word is being expounded and explained, treated as holy and authoritative, and applied to my soul. I would love to feed my soul all day in such a way. Indeed that is what the Lord has given you a Christian Sabbath of rest for, not for a scripture snack, but for a day of digesting his glorious word. Many of you are not unbelievers rather you are mature believers, this day of digesting his word is not too much to ask of you, now that your appetite for him has expanded, I hope. But if you have been fasting from the word, refraining

from eating its meat, your stomach for such things may have shrunk. Oh that we would be like the Jewish leaders of Rome, happy to hear, interested to hear testimony to the kingdom.

Myth 8: You have to use the New Testament to proclaim the kingdom.

"testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets."

You don't have to preach or teach from the New Testament to proclaim the glorious kingdom of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is full of teachings about Christ. Even the Law, Paul proclaims Jesus from the law. Jesus fulfils the law. Jesus abided by the law. Jesus was the tabernacle, the dwelling place of God among men. He was the sanctified chief priest, who offered the purest, most pleasing sacrifice to the Father through his shed blood on the cross. He allows us to enter the promised land of heaven and heaven here on earth in the community of believers. He is our Sabbath rest from all our labors having completed what the law could not do.

and the prophets...

What is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy God? The word of God, contained in the scriptures, of the Old and the New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him. Study the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. Study the Old Testament in order to understand the New Testament. Request teaching on the Old Testament. Get teaching for yourself on the Old Testament. If you doubt its relevance and importance for our day, just notice how much Leviticus has been talked about with regards to homosexuality in recent days. We must know what Leviticus says, and how Leviticus and the Old Testament should be rightly interpreted.

Teaching from the Old Testament is not a hindrance to the gospel going forth it is an example of the gospel going forth. It will greatly assist your kingdom proclamation if you understand covenant theology and how the testaments relate. Might it not be helpful to understand how the kingdom was intended if we are indeed proclaiming a kingdom now?

Myth 9: Telling people to believe in Jesus and actively warning them scares people away.

"and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law and from the Prophets." The Greek word translated convince here is *diamarturomai*, it is elsewhere used to mean warn or charge. Paul is actively engaged in persuasive argument. He is endeavoring to change people's minds with regard to how they think about Jesus. One would think this would be the very essence of gospel proclamation. This seems to be an example *par excellence* of evangelism. If it is then why have a great many professing Christians ceased trying to convince people to change their minds about Jesus? Have you taken a break from trying to convince people that Jesus is God and king?

In our culture we really frown upon overt appeals to change your mind. It's considered argumentative, boorish, rude, impolite. Look at what scorn the verbs convert or proselytize have in our culture. We'd much prefer to "Preach the gospel at all times, use words if necessary." By which we commonly mean, don't use words, just be nice to others. Reasoned argument may be out of fashion in contemporary America but that doesn't mean that the gospel doesn't go forth in such a way. In Paul's case, he was trying to convince people, who held to a different religion, that Jesus was God. Such bold convincing sometimes results in new believers.

In application, **boldly proclaim the kingdom of Jesus and the gospel will go forth without hindrance.** Don't avoid trying to convince someone about Jesus. Go ahead and talk to people about Jesus who aren't already convinced about Jesus. But in order to do that you need to be convinced about Jesus. Who do you say Jesus is? Why do you say that's who Jesus is? Are you ready to give an account for the hope that is in you? Have you shared your testimony recently? A good place to start is in your own home. Do your children know your testimony? Do they know how the Lord has led you recently. Once you are convinced of Jesus' Lordship try to convince others who are unconvinced. It's exciting to try.

So some were convinced by Paul, others weren't. Disbelief is not proof that the proclamation of the kingdom is hindered, at least verse 31 doesn't conceive of it

so. But as it was becoming evident in Paul's home that some believed and others did not Paul quoted Isaiah. Some Jewish leaders may have been raising the question, "If Jesus is the promised Messiah why haven't all of the Jews been convinced?" "If it really were so evident that he was the king, why did his own people have him crucified?" These are questions that are still raised today. The broad disbelief in Jesus is one of the reasons why many question his deity. If Jesus were God, wouldn't it be evident? Well, it is evident, many choose not to believe. For believing something is not merely a matter of evidence, it is also a matter of will to believe. And so Paul argues that it was prophesied that many wouldn't believe. They didn't believe because they wouldn't believe. This brings us to our final myth regarding gospel preaching.

Myth 10: Never, ever shame people in the proclamation of the kingdom.

read Isaiah passage.

Paul's proclamation ends with preaching from the prophet Isaiah. What Isaiah says is also echoed in the other prophets. What Paul is saying here is nothing new. It has been God's purpose since Adam, since Noah, since Abraham, since Moses, since David to bless all the nations of the earth. It was his plan to use his covenant people to bless all people and in so doing bring them into covenant with himself. But the Jews had become a dead end street for blessing not a thoroughfare for blessing. (May it not be so for we Christians.) Paul is saying what Jesus himself had said in Matthew 13:14-15. That the secrets of the kingdom had been given to some and not to others. It is not outside God's purpose but instead for his glory that some believe and some don't. It does not thwart his plans. It does not rob him of glory. The fact that some don't believe is not a reason to disbelieve. It is a reason to believe all the more.

Paul is saying that though many of the Jews don't believe, the Gentiles believe so the gospel has been given to them. This is shameful to the Jews. This is embarrassing that their promised Messiah goes to the Gentiles because his own people won't listen. They should be ashamed. It is not wrong to point it out.

As a parent of multiple children I try not to compare my children with one another, especially not with regard to obedience. I don't want to set up a favorite. I don't want to promote strife between our children. But sometimes one of your children obeys and one doesn't. If I, as a parent, give a direction that every child should go clean their room and two respond with a good attitude saying "Yes, Dad." and one whines and says No! It is right to point out the distinction between obedience and disobedience. It is to the child's shame that he doesn't obey. Paul is merely doing a similar thing in gospel proclamation. He is saying, "If you won't listen, God will find others who will."

But this kind of teaching is out of fashion. If some Christians will even admit to the teaching that God has chosen some and not others, they dare not explain it. If some Christians will explain it they will not do so in the presence of non-believers. It is a very divisive doctrine. Yet it is one to be preached.

If you have seen with your eyes, if you have heard with your ears, if you have understood with your heart, it is because the Sovereign Grace of our Lord has revealed it to you. Hallelujah. You have turned. He has healed you. It is the salvation of our God. He has done it and it is marvelous in our eyes.

As you have listened and turned you fulfill what Paul spoke in verse 28 "this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles they will listen." Have you listened? If so rejoice because it is the work of the Lord in your heart. It is by grace you have been saved through faith. Be not ashamed of this gospel for it is the power of God for salvation of everyone who believes first for the Jew and also for the Greek.

Verse 30-31

Luke concludes his report by noting that Paul lived in such a state for at least two whole years. What is so hilarious about this whole situation is that the Jews arrested him in order to stop the spread of the gospel. Then Caesar postpones his trial, having no regard for the gospel. And so two powers opposed to the spread of the gospel are unwittingly used for its unhindered propagation. He who sits in the heavens laughs as the nations rage and the people plot in vain against the Lord and his anointed.

So neither Jew nor Greek can stop the kingdom of God being proclaimed with boldness. Not even the depth of your own sin can hinder you in being involved in the proclamation of the kingdom of God. Paul had persecuted Christians, for being Christians. He was responsible for killing at least one Christian. Yet the Lord could use even him. The Lord can use even you, Christian, in spite of your sin. That is heart-warming... and convicting. We are left with no good reason to abstain from proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.