

Sermon 80, The Kingdom's Future, Acts 28:30-31

Proposition: The ending of Acts, by showing what Jesus continues to do and teach, provides a paradigm for the church in all ages.

- I. The Kingdom Is Certain
- II. The Kingdom Is Greater than Any Kingdom Servant
 - A. Luke Doesn't Wrap up Peter's Story
 - B. Luke Doesn't Wrap up Paul's Story
 - C. The Kingdom Is the Thing; Servants Come and Go
- III. The Kingdom Keeps Spreading
 - A. Through Welcoming All Comers, v. 30b
 - B. Through Preaching the Kingdom, v. 31a
 - C. Through Teaching about Christ, v. 31b
 - D. Through Boldness Unhindered, v. 31c

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, it's been eighty weeks of joy to study this book together with you. What a treasure trove of the wisdom and knowledge of God are here in these too-short pages as they summarize the early spread of God's kingdom from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth! So what do we take away from these final two verses of the book? This is Luke's summary, wrapping up everything he wants us to know from his two-volume work. So we will review his main point: The Kingdom is certain. We will also review his two subpoints: The Kingdom is greater than any particular servant of the Kingdom, no matter how important, and the Kingdom keeps spreading through the proclamation of Jesus and His reign.

I. The Kingdom Is Certain

First of all, the kingdom is certain. If you go back to the beginning of Luke's gospel, you can see that he announces up front what his goal is.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4 ESV)

So why did Luke write? So that we could be certain about what we've learned of Christ. Acts in particular is about the Kingdom of God. The whole point is the certainty of the Kingdom. By seeing how the reign of Christ sent the Holy Spirit, breached the temple boundaries, brought men and women into submission all over the Mediterranean, and ruled the machinations of

politicians, the vagaries of the weather, and even the obstinacy of the Jews, we see that Jesus really does reign and that nothing can stop His Kingdom.

Do you believe in the certainty of the Kingdom? Do you have any doubt in your mind regarding whether Jesus reigns, also over your less-than-ideal circumstances? If you do have doubts, the goal of Acts is to put them to rest. When you see all the ways in which Christ's reign was manifested in the first thirty years of the church, you should have no doubt about whether He is in charge.

II. The Kingdom Is Greater than Any Kingdom Servant

The second thing that the ending of Acts brings out so clearly is that the Kingdom is the main thing. The Kingdom is greater than any Kingdom servant. Now, attentive readers have already seen that Luke introduces and drops human characters at the drop of a hat. From Paul's nephew to Simon the Sorcerer and the python-possessed slave girl, Luke brings them in, tells that fraction of their life that relates to his immediate purposes, and then moves on. Can you imagine how weird Acts would be if it had an epilogue in which he told what eventually happened to all of the minor characters? "Philip's four daughters all ended up getting married to Paul's nephews, and they had tons of kids and were faithful Christians to the end." "Bernice moved on to marry some other client king, but always had a soft spot for her brother Agrippa." And so on. There are dozens of these minor characters, and he gives not one bite of further information on any of them.

A. Luke Doesn't Wrap up Peter's Story

But this is not merely true of minor characters. Not to belabor the obvious, but it's true of major characters as well. Luke doesn't wrap up Paul's story. There is no note saying that Peter went and became bishop of Antioch, no reminder that he pastored in Rome for a time and left the bishopric there in charge of the universal church. We don't know what happened to Peter after his speech at the Jerusalem council.

B. Luke Doesn't Wrap up Paul's Story

Same goes for Paul. All of the commentators have to pose the question "Why doesn't Acts end with the death of Paul?" Brothers and sisters, to ask that question is to indicate that you haven't been paying attention. It would be totally uncharacteristic for Luke to tell the story of a human character all the way through to the end. That is just not how he works. It's like asking why the Bible never says what happened to Mary. The answer, again, is that the NT writers were not interested in such questions, any more than the OT writers were interested in the death of Jonah or whatever happened to Nathan and Gad in Solomon's court.

C. The Kingdom Is the Thing; Servants Come and Go

In short, the upshot of this observation is simple: The Kingdom is the thing. Luke is interested in the reign of Christ. He is not interested in the whole life of every Kingdom servant. He can't be. The book of Acts would be twice as long if he had to trace the life story of every character out to the end.

Do you believe this? That if you seek first the Kingdom, the rest will fall into place? It's what Jesus promised, after all. This is why we don't go in for pastor religion, for instance. We

are not members of this church because we all love our wonderful pastor. I think I'm a decent pastor who is well-suited to the flock God has brought here. But I also know that I am expendable. I'm not the Kingdom of God; our church is not the Kingdom. We are nobodies; our importance comes from associating with Jesus, not His importance from associating with us.

So what happened to Paul and Peter? Luke's answer, of course, is that it doesn't matter. The Kingdom is what counts, and the Kingdom is doing just fine. It grew through Peter's work, Paul's work, Philip's work, and the work of millions of others, named and unnamed, remembered and forgotten. But we are not interested in the name of the sub-sub-librarian in Jesus' palace. We are not interested in hearing about the undersecretary of the environment. We are interested in the King. His administration does not change, for He rules by the power of an indestructible life.

III. The Kingdom Keeps Spreading

So the Kingdom is just fine. We don't need to hear how Paul and Peter died. Luke is rather interested in telling us how the Kingdom lived, and how it continues to live. The answer to that, of course, is here in the final two verses of Acts.

A. Through Welcoming All Comers, v. 30b

First of all, the Kingdom spreads through welcoming all comers. Whoever wants to come and hear the truth from us is welcome. Grandpa likes to say that churches used to put "All welcome" on their signs, but they've stopped doing that because quite a few individuals are not welcome. There are people you just don't want in your church. He has a valid point. But as true as his point is, it is massively outweighed by the other side of the issue, which is this: All Christian people instinctively want their church to grow. We all know that we have received a good thing, a wonderful thing, from God. And we naturally want to share it. We are predisposed to welcome all comers, like Paul, because we have something to share with all comers. We do welcome all who come, and we should keep welcoming all who come. Yes, the other side of that is that the church may need to take appropriate safety precautions, etc. with certain types of sex offenders or violent criminals. But by and large, those who want to be in church are welcome in church.

B. Through Preaching the Kingdom, v. 31a

Secondly, the church is called to preach the Kingdom. We don't just offer hope and salvation and forgiveness of sins. We offer the world put right, and we do so through Jesus Christ. He is King; He is reigning over the cosmos, bringing it back under His Father's dominion. That is the core of Luke's message, the core of Paul's message, and the core of our message.

A church that fails to preach the Kingdom is like a church that fails to welcome all comers. It is a church that is not living up to its birthright. It's a church that does not reflect the full glory of its Lord. Imagine an ancient Israelite celebrating David only as a poet, but never mentioning that he is also the king! That is what many churches are like. We celebrate Jesus as a great artist, a champion of beauty and joy — but we never mention that He is a King to be obeyed unquestioningly.

C. Through Teaching about Christ, v. 31b

Paul also taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke uses the full name with titles to remind us that Jesus is fully man, but also our Lord and Yahweh's Anointed One. The apostle's teaching, then,

was about every aspect of Jesus Christ. He did not leave out the reality that Jesus is King. Nor did he leave out Jesus' mission, His humanity, His anointing, and His power as Lord.

A church is a successful church insofar as it exalts and worships Jesus Christ. A genuine church needs to teach about Christ. Endless marriage seminars, expositions of the Ten Commandments, culture war and political gamesmanship and all the rest of it can have a place in the church. But if they become the main point, to the exclusion of the Lord Jesus Christ, they are usurpers and must be thrust back so that He can have the room that He needs. If a museum has a full T. Rex skeleton, but they use the display space to show off a bunch of worthless Beanie Babies, you know they have a problem. Their priorities are wrong. The same goes for any church that keeps Jesus on the back burner. If He is not front and center, the church is failing.

D. Through Boldness Unhindered, v. 31c

Luke's final description of Paul witness is that it showed bold freedom of speech, unhindered — "no man forbidding," as the KJV has it. Finally! That's how one commentator expressed the reader's feelings on seeing this phrase. Paul has been forbidden to preach in so many localities we can't even remember them all. But in Rome, the door is open. Preaching is not forbidden. The church is allowed to operate freely, speaking boldly about Jesus and not hindered from doing so by outside influences. I rejoice to say that for many people through much of history, this has been true. It continues to be true of the church in the West today, and even in parts of the East. Churches operate freely in many localities in Russia, China, and India. Even in the Arab world some churches operate with boldness of speech and few meaningful hindrances. Praise God! I don't know that Luke is suggesting that this is the norm; he's shown us the hindrances and restrictions under which Peter and Paul labored. But he is certainly suggesting that, even if not the norm, it is a consummation devoutly to be wished. When no one is hindering you, church, use great boldness and freedom of speech. Say what needs to be said about Jesus!

Do we do that? Are we so certain of the Kingdom that we are willing to, you know, talk about it? I hope so. I pray so. I pray that Luke's account of the certainty of the Kingdom has made you more certain of the Kingdom than ever before, more willing to show openness unhindered when speaking of these things. That was part of Luke's goal; bring it to pass in your life.

The Kingdom is certain; the Kingdom is growing. Join it, and stay with it. You'll never regret it. Amen.