

**Sunday December 11, 2022**

## **Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church**

### **Welcome & Prayer**

*"LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens.*

*<sup>2</sup>Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. <sup>3</sup>When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, <sup>4</sup>what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? <sup>5</sup>You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honour. <sup>6</sup>You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: <sup>7</sup>all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, <sup>8</sup>the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. <sup>9</sup>LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"*

Let's pray. Dear Lord Almighty, how majestic is your name in all the earth. This day we wish the whole world would recognise your name, would recognise your power and grace and justice and mercy. We admit that we don't always remember how great you are. We don't always live in line with your holiness. We don't always rely upon your power. We don't always listen to your Word. So please forgive us. And place your Holy Spirit within us so that today we might worship you with heart, soul mind and body. We might be renewed in our faith. That we might desire to humble ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus each day. Be with us today and especially throughout this service, for we need you today more than ever. And we ask these things in Jesus' name Amen.

### **Song – Almighty Maker** [Almighty Maker \(YouTube\)](#)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Who but the Lord set the bound'ries of light | 2. Who but the Lord could have dreamed of the plan |
| Hung the stars in the night?                    | That would save fallen man?                        |
| Who but the Lord drew the face on the moon      | Who but the Lord washes rebels with blood          |
| Made the planets to move?                       | Making mercy a flood?                              |
| Who but the Lord tells the clouds               | Who but the Lord could give life through a cross   |
| When to pour. Thunder to roar?                  | Rescuing us?                                       |
| Amazing are Your works                          | Amazing are Your ways                              |

Chorus

Almighty Maker

You command heaven and earth

By the power of Your Word

Be praised forever

Almighty Maker

All creation sings of You

Glory fills all that You do

Be praised forever, ever, evermore

Chorus

Bridge

All things are from You

All things are through You

O God, the great I AM

All things are for You

All things are to You

O God, the great I AM

### **Bible Reading – Acts 27:1-26 (NIV)**

*When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. <sup>2</sup>We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.*

*<sup>3</sup>The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs. <sup>4</sup>From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because*

the winds were against us. <sup>5</sup> When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. <sup>6</sup> There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. <sup>7</sup> We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone. <sup>8</sup> We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea. <sup>9</sup> Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement. So Paul warned them, <sup>10</sup> "Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also." <sup>11</sup> But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. <sup>12</sup> Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix & winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest. <sup>13</sup> When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. <sup>14</sup> Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island. <sup>15</sup> The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. <sup>16</sup> As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure, <sup>17</sup> so the men hoisted it aboard. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Because they were afraid, they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. <sup>18</sup> We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. <sup>19</sup> On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. <sup>20</sup> When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved. <sup>21</sup> After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. <sup>22</sup> But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. <sup>23</sup> Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me <sup>24</sup> and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' <sup>25</sup> So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. <sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

## Announcements

**Focus for December – Christmas.** Life is manic at the moment and that is why we need the manger! In the midst of the busyness of life, if we pause for a while, we see God slowly going about his business, bringing about our salvation. Conception. Birth. Growing up. 30 years. Everything happens pretty slowly at first before Jesus begins to step out of the Nazareth shadows. And if we stop and reflect on that it might help us when our world moves past us at a break neck speed. So stop. Ponder. Wonder. Worship. Maybe the greatest gift of Christmas is the opportunity to step off the tread mill and be reminded of what is truly important. Don't forget to that this year!

### Christmas Services

- Sat 24/12 Christmas Eve service – 6pm
- Sun 25/12 Christmas Day service – 8am (Swansea) and 9:30am (Charlestown)

**Vanuatu.** Please keep praying for those going on a short-term mission trip to Vanuatu in January. There are seven of them, Cheryl & Caleb Gillard, Jannah Pittman, Juliette McAlister, Luke Wigney, Rebecca Causley and Stephen Taylor. If you would like to sign up for prayer updates or support the cost of materials for our projects, please see either Stephen T or Cheryl G.

**Gather Round.** Many thanks to all those who worked so hard to make last night such a great night.

**Kids Church Presentation.** This morning is our time to celebrate what we have learned this year at Kids Church and to thank God for all that he given us this year. This means the kids will perform some items in Church before receiving their prizes and having their own celebration. A special thanks to all the teachers who have spent so much time and effort in teaching our kids. And to Suzie who each year does a mammoth task of coordinating our Kids Church programme and teachers.

**Giving.** Would you like to give regularly to the work of the church so that our ministries can be sustained or even grow? If so, the easiest way is by setting up a direct debit from your bank account. You just decide you much you would like to give on a weekly basis and then organise that amount to go to our Church each week. If you would like help to set it up then please speak to Letitia. Otherwise, the Church Bank details are Charlestown Eastlakes Presbyterian BSB 062-829 Account 10194850

**TEAR Fund.** During the Christmas services we will have a retiring offering for the work of TEAR Fund. As a Church we believe that Christmas is a great time to think about those less fortunate than ourselves. TEAR Fund is a practical expression of a Christians love for the poor. Please support it as you are able.

**School Holidays.** NSW School holidays begin later on this week which means that many of our regular activities in the Church will go into recess very soon. Before they do can we take some time to thank the leaders of SPARKLERS, CRECHE, KIDS CHURCH, IMPACT, our HOME GROUPS, MISSION COMMITTEE, PASTORAL CARE COMMITTEE, EVENTS TEAM, WOMEN'S COMMITTEE, COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT and our ELDERS. That is almost 100 people! THANK YOU SO MUCH. We ask the Lord to bless you in the same way that you have blessed us.

**CHUCH CAMP.** 3-5<sup>th</sup> March 2023. Early bird ends next Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> December.

**Discipleship Course:** In 2023 we are starting a weekly home group focussed on discipleship. It's designed for Christians of any age who are seeking to go deeper and further as a disciple of Jesus, using material created specifically for this purpose. If you would like to know more, please chat with Stephen Taylor or John and Miranda Harris.

## Prayer Points for 11<sup>th</sup> December 2022

**Psalm 34:8** "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him."

**Pray for Kuwait:** • Pray for God to use His unlimited resources to make Himself known to Muslims. Pray for the salvation of Kuwaitis studying in nations where the Gospel is openly proclaimed. Pray for expatriate believers to be fearless speakers of truth.

**Pray for our government:** Pray they will seek peace and wisdom. Pray they will defend truth and righteousness.

**Pray for Christmas season:** And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people." Pray that many Australians will meet the Christ of Christmas. Pray that many would believe in Him and find true joy and peace.

## Bible Reading – Acts 28:11-31

<sup>11</sup>After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island, it was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor & Pollux. <sup>12</sup>We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. <sup>13</sup>From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. <sup>14</sup>There we found some brothers and sisters who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him. <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. <sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain." <sup>21</sup>They replied, "We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. <sup>22</sup>But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect." <sup>23</sup>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 & from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. <sup>24</sup> Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. <sup>25</sup> They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet: <sup>26</sup> "Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." <sup>27</sup> For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' <sup>28</sup> "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" <sup>[29]</sup> <sup>30</sup> For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. <sup>31</sup> He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!

## Song – Will your anchor hold?

[Will your anchor hold? \(YouTube\)](#)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>1. Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,<br/>When the clouds unfold their wings of strife?<br/>When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,<br/>Will your anchor drift or firm remain?</p> | <p>2. Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear<br/>When the breakers roar and the reef is near<br/>While the surges rave and the wild winds blow<br/>Shall the angry waves then your bark o'flow</p> |
|--|--|

### Chorus

*We have an anchor that keeps the soul  
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll,  
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,  
Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love.*

3. Will your anchor hold in the floods of death  
When the waters cold chill your latest breath?  
On the rising tide you can never fail  
While your anchor holds within the veil

## Sermon – Rome Coming! - Stephen T

There's a spot off the coast of South Africa where the gales from Antarctica hit the cross winds from the Atlantic Ocean and the swells of the cold Atlantic Ocean meet the warmer Indian Ocean to produce a region called the Cape of Storms. And the Cape of Storms is a dangerous place to sail and has caused many, many shipwrecks over the years.

Slide 2

On one occasion in the early 1900s, a ship called the Petronella, was sailing from Europe around the Cape of Storms and onto the Far East when they hit the Perfect Storm. The gale forced the ship onto the rocks and it started to take water. Wave after wave battered this vessel and most people on board lost their lives. But on the shoreline watching it all happen before his very eyes was a Presbyterian minister who pleaded with God to have mercy on the people on board and to spare some of their lives.

And the Lord did just that. A number got to the shore and this clergyman was their wrapping blankets around them and bringing them back to his house so he could care for them. Most ended up getting transport back home but two brothers who were running away from their past stayed. He helped them and looked after them and as the time went on, they came under the word of God & became Christians. One went on to marry the minister's daughter, the other became a successful businessman and both of them ended up planting Churches along the Cape of Storms. **The Cape of Storms** that basically cost the ship and many lives that were on board became **the grace of storms** to these two brothers and many others.

Slide 3

Isn't that so true of life? The storms batter us. The difficulties come and go. The troubles always seem to follow us. But God can turn those storms into grace. He can shape us through the tough times & help us enjoy the good times so much more. In the words of the hymnwriter William Cowper, "God moves in a

*mysterious way, His wonders to perform. He plants His footsteps in the sea & rides upon the storm. Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take, the clouds you so much dread, are big with mercy & shall break in blessings on your head."*

That's what we are going to see in Acts 27 & 28. We will see the apostle Paul travelling to Rome where his ship hits the mother of all storms. But we see God's grace and sovereignty work through those storms to spread the gospel of the Lord Jesus even deeper into his heart and even further throughout the world. And throughout this passage we too will be challenged to allow that very same gospel of grace to penetrate deeper into our hearts and allow it to travel from us throughout our world as well. So, let's begin with Paul

Slide 4

### 1. Travelling to Rome (27:1-28:16)

We pick up from where we left off last week. Luke has spent the last six chapter of his book describing the trials that Paul has faced while in Jerusalem. He has been arrested for his faith, put on trial numerous times and when after two years the process seemed to grinding to a halt, Paul appeals to Caesar. And so, he is sent to Rome.

*"When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. <sup>2</sup> We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea."* But if Paul thought he had faced some troubles up until this point, he hadn't seen anything yet!

For over the next 54 verses we see everything including the kitchen sink is thrown at Paul. Firstly, we see danger as the weather closes in and the shipping channels get more and more treacherous. We see a wind of hurricane force, blow them away from the coast & into the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. The sailors do whatever they can to save the people on board but in the end lose all hope of saving their lives.

Slide 5

We see the boat eventually gets stuck on a sandbar and the stern is broken into pieces by the surf. Miraculously all 276 occupants of the ship survive, including Paul. But soon after he surviving the shipwreck Paul is bitten by a venomous snake but God protects him from the poison and eventually, they all make it to Rome.

Slide 6

It's a travel blog that would discourage any of us from ever going on a cruise ever again. But it is not just there to keep us on the edge of our seats and worry over whether or not Paul would get to Rome or not. Because God has already appeared to Paul and told him that he will make it to Rome. For Acts 23:11 we read that *"night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage as you have testified about me in Jerusalem so **you must** also testify in Rome"*

Slide 7

You see the Lord has already spoken on this issue. Paul will testify in Rome. For the Lord is sovereign. He is in control of snakes and storms, of shipwrecks and sailors. And we notice that throughout Paul's ordeals, the Lord remains close to Paul. For example, in Acts 27:23, Paul stands up in front of the crew and tells them <sup>23</sup>*"Last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me <sup>24</sup> and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar & God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.'"*

But how does the apostle Paul, respond to God's sovereign power? With open handed faith. He continues, <sup>25</sup>*"So keep up your courage, men, **for I have faith in God** that it will happen just as he told me.*

<sup>26</sup>*Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."*

Slide 8

The sailors have given up all hope of being saved but Paul stands out from the crowd because he trusts God's word so much that he knows that he will be saved. And if they keep close to him, they too will be

saved from the clutches of the sea. So when they lose all hope, it is Paul that stands up and gives them hope.

When they sense they are getting near land, the sailors seek to escape but it is Paul that protects the rest of the passengers by warning the centurion of their plan. And when the soldiers want to kill all the prisoners, it is the example of Paul's courage and faith that saves both himself and the other prisoners. And it is Paul that urges them to eat when their strength is running low and it is Paul that assures them again of the Lord's protection.

Paul although a mere prisoner becomes the moral leader of the ship. He shows a courage, a wisdom, an encouragement, a faith that keeps all those close to him safe. And the reason he has this backbone is because he believes the word of God. Paul is not a superhero but he does have one exceptional superpower. And that he is willing to trust in the Lord who is sovereign over all things. Who controls storms and shipwrecks, snakes and high seas.

Slide 9

Now how does he do this? In his second letter to the Corinthians, he goes through some of what he had endured up until that point. Flogged, stoned, beaten with rods, three times he was shipwrecked, spent a night in the open sea, in danger from rivers, bandits, Jews, Gentiles, in the city, country, on the high sea and from false believers. And his secret? God's grace was sufficient for him. God's power was made perfect in Paul's weakness. *"That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*

Friends Paul is not made of different stuff to what you and I are made of. But it was in these sorts of tough times that Paul learnt not to rely upon himself, but on God. Not on his faith but on God's grace. Not on the ship but on God's sovereignty. For Paul knew he was right where God wanted him to be. And if the struggles around him became more and more difficult then it led Paul into a greater dependence upon the one who is in complete control.

Slide 10

Friends going through the storms of life does not mean that you are out of God's will. In fact, you & I may be exactly where God wants us to be. For it is in the tough times in my life that have been the times of greatest spiritual growth. You see when everything is smooth sailing, I don't really need God's help, I can do that all on my own. But when the wind blows, and the ship begins to crack up from under my feet and I feel like I am drowning, that's when I get to the end of my resources & find that God's resources are more than sufficient.

Remember immediately after feeding the 5,000 we are told that **"Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and to go out ahead of Him to the other side while He sent the crowds away."** It's interesting because that little word "made" actually carries the force of compulsion. It was a strong persuasion. In other words, He was telling them, "There is no other way for you to do this but to get in the boat and go across." And the text tells us that He was actually sending them out into a storm. Why would He do that? Because there was an aspect of His deity, there was an aspect of who He was as God Most High that they didn't yet grasp and they needed to know that before He would die and go to His place in glory.

There are some lessons we will only learn in the storm. Where we need to trust in the word of God. Where we need to draw near to his ongoing presence. Where we need to rely on the leading of his Holy Spirit. Where the gospel of grace penetrates deeper into our lives.

Slide 11

The blind hymnwriter Fanny Crosby put it this way *"Dark is the night & cold the wind is blowing; Nearer and nearer comes the breakers' roar. Where shall I go, or whither fly for refuge? Hide me, my Father, till the storm is o'er. With His loving hand to guide, let the clouds above me roll, And the billows in their fury dash*

*around me. I can brave the wildest storm with His glory in my soul, I can sing amidst the tempest Praise the Lord!"*

While travelling to Rome, God gets Paul to the place that he wants him to go. You see Paul had wanted to get to Rome for years now. He had written that his aim was to preach the gospel there and use it as a base for further expansion of the Church. And God gets him there. But he gets him there as a prisoner. God gives Paul what he wanted. But not the way that he wanted to get it! But once Paul travels to Rome we next see

Slide 12

## 2. Paul teaching in Rome. (Acts 28:16-29)

*"When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him. <sup>17</sup> Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders."* Now Paul doesn't waste any time, does he?

*"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. Slide 13 <sup>18</sup> They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is **because of the hope of Israel** that I am bound with this chain."*

Paul has manufactured a reason to talk to the Jews about the gospel of the Lord Jesus. Yes, it has caused problems on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea in Jerusalem but after all, this is the hope of Israel. That a Messiah would come. That the Kingdom of God would be established here on earth. That the promised Saviour would save his people. And so, we see that nothing will stop Paul from delivering this message. Nothing.

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*<sup>23</sup> "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 & from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus."*

There is something amazing about this scene. Paul is in chains, but the word of God is unchained. Paul is a prisoner but he preaches a Saviour that would set the prisoner of sin free. Yes, time and time again Paul had preached the gospel to the Jew first and had been thrown out of town but that doesn't mean Paul won't do it one last time. Besides the Jews won't throw him out of town this time because he has a date with Caesar Nero coming up!

Slide 15

But notice how bold Paul is. He will preach positively about Jesus but also negatively about the hard heartedness that he sees before him. *"Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet: <sup>26</sup> "Go to this people and say, "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving." <sup>27</sup> For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them."*

You see even the rejection of the Jews to the gospel somehow comes under God's sovereignty. For when the Jews refuse to receive the prophet's words about Jesus, they actually confirm the prophet's words about themselves! God knows that they will hear but not respond. God understands the state of the heart that unless it is illuminated by his Holy Spirit, it won't, no it can't turn to Him. But that won't stop Paul from his preaching. He tells them if the Jews will not believe he will now focus his proclamation on the Gentiles.

Which is what he does next. *“For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. <sup>31</sup> He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!”* Caesar Nero is in no hurry to see the apostle Paul so Paul makes good use of his time by proclaiming the gospel to all who would come and hear it. To the Jews. To the Gentiles. To the Roman guard.

Listen to how he put it in the book of Philippians 1 <sup>12</sup> *“Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. <sup>13</sup> As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. <sup>14</sup> And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.”*

At the centre of the mighty Roman empire people are hearing about the gospel of the Lord Jesus. And some are being converted. And then these merchants and soldiers and converts are going throughout the Roman world and will take the message of Jesus with them. No wonder Paul wanted to go to Rome so much. And because Paul was in chains, others filled his spot. They were emboldened to preach, to reason, to debate and to boldly declare the word of God to all and sundry. Because Paul is no longer there, others step into the breach.

And so, we end the book of Acts with the gospel going to the ends of the earth as Jesus had directed. We see that Rome is fully evangelised. We see that Rome has been trained with a missionary zeal. We see that the word of God goes out *“with all boldness & without hindrance!”* Yes, Paul’s feet are bound but his mouth was open for Jesus. He might be chained but the word of God is unchained. He might be hindered from travelling but God is certainly not hindered at all. For the word of God goes out with all boldness and without hindrance!

### 3. For now it is **Transitioning from Rome**

For really the book of Acts seems to stop in a strange place, doesn’t it? Did Paul get to preach the gospel to Caesar? It doesn’t say. Was he executed or released? It doesn’t say! What happens to the gospel after this? It doesn’t say! It is a bit like one of those TV shows that ends with the words TO BE CONTINUED. For the story of the spread of the gospel will continue and continues to continue as Paul fades from view and others take his place.

You see Paul is not the real hero of this book, God is. You know, if Luke had ended The Acts of The Apostles with Paul being executed, our focus would be upon the Apostle Paul. But Paul wouldn’t want that. The focus must be upon the gospel! The focus must be upon the purpose of God. The focus must be upon God’s rule and reign.

So, do we know what happens to Paul? We can piece together some clues from his writing. You see in those two years, Paul writes four epistles, the letters to Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. Letters that helped the spread of the gospel ever since. You see Paul’s trials has helped shape him. Given him a knowledge base that has been used by God for generations to come. Nothing is wasted when handed over to Him.

Now the book of Acts says that he was imprisoned in Rome for two years. Now if we believe the promise of God in Acts 27, Paul would have testified to Caesar. And it seems that after that he was released for a period of 2-3 years. During this time, he writes the letters to Timothy and Titus. He also must have done some travelling in this time because he leaves Titus in Crete (Titus 1:5), he leaves Trophimus sick in Miletus



(2 Tim 4:20) and he organises for Timothy to minister in Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3). He also planned to meet some of his helpers at Nicopolis (Titus 3:12-13) and maybe he even got to travel to Spain as he hoped.

It looks like he was then arrested again. Chained in a prison cell and tradition tells us he was beheaded in Rome a couple of years later. He had fought the good fight. He had finished the race. He had kept the faith. And he was now to receive the crown of righteousness from Jesus Himself. And Luke could have included all those details but chose not to.

Slide 20

Because the way that he leaves his book is open ended. The gospel is not chained. The Holy Spirit will continue to do his work and so it the Church that will write Acts chapters 29 & beyond. You and I are writing those chapters today. Right here, right now in Lake Macquarie, the Acts of the Apostles, the march of the Church goes on. Now we are not actually writing Scripture, but we are applying the Scriptures to our local environment.

We are the ones who should be showing courage and faith. We are the ones who are men of women of thanks & of prayer. We are still explaining, declaring, convincing, challenging and preaching the gospel. Despite the opposition, despite the difficulties, despite the problems we face we are called to continue on in the very footsteps of Paul. He has gone but his God continues to march on, ensuing the gospel goes to the ends of the earth.

Slide 21

Paul says *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* (Phil 4:13) And that is also true of us today. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. We can take up the baton that Paul is handing us today. We can continue to fight the good fight. We can run the race until the end. We can keep the faith. And we can pass it on others.

But we can also train the next generation. We can witness to a lost generation. We can invest in our family so they can be believers for generations. And we can support the work of mission so that the whole world might know what we know, that Jesus Christ is Lord of all

Slide 22

It was Spurgeon who after preaching through the book of Acts said *"What was begun with great heroism ought to be continue today with ardent zeal, since we are assured that the same Lord is mighty to carry on His heavenly designs."*

Slide 23

Or in the words of Winston Churchill *"Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is perhaps the end of the beginning."* For in the book of Acts, Peter preached the kingdom in Jerusalem, Philip proclaimed Christ in Samaria, Paul announced Jesus around the Roman Empire, but where will you go? Where will we as a Church go? The word is going out without hindrance which means that you and I need to spread it with all boldness.

## Song – Facing a Task Unfinished [Facing A Task Unfinished \(YouTube\)](#)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>1. Facing a task unfinished<br/>That drives us to our knees<br/>A need that undiminished<br/>Rebukes our slothful ease<br/>We, who rejoice to know Thee<br/>Renew before Thy throne<br/>The solemn pledge we owe Thee<br/>To go and make Thee known</p>       | <p>3. We bear the torch that flaming<br/>Fell from the hands of those<br/>Who gave their lives proclaiming<br/>That Jesus died and rose<br/>Ours is the same commission<br/>The same glad message ours<br/>Fired by the same ambition<br/>To Thee we yield our powers</p> |
| <p>2. Where other Lords beside Thee<br/>Hold their unhindered sway<br/>Where forces that defied Thee<br/>Defy Thee still today<br/>With none to heed their crying<br/>For life and love and light<br/>Unnumbered souls are dying<br/>And pass into the night</p> | <p>4. O Father who sustained them<br/>O Spirit who inspired<br/>Saviour, whose love constrained them<br/>To toil with zeal untired<br/>From cowardice defend us<br/>From lethargy awake!<br/>Forth on Thine errands send us<br/>To labour for Thy sake</p>                |

Chorus: We go to all the world  
With kingdom hope unfurled  
No other name has power to save  
But Jesus Christ The Lord

**Benediction.** <sup>30</sup>For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. <sup>31</sup>He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!