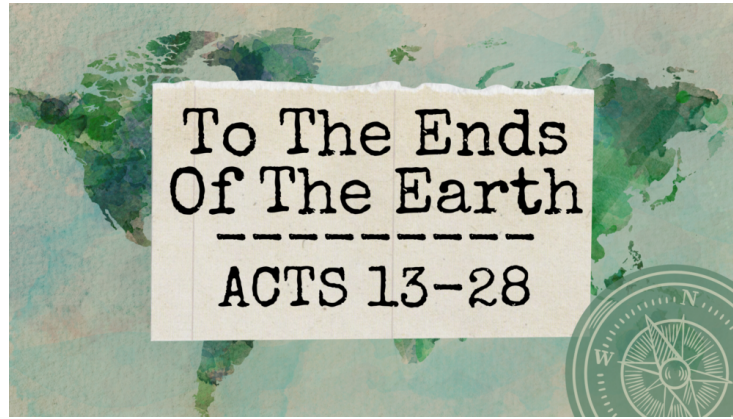


Keeping the Cross and Kingdom Together



Acts 28:11–30

Bro Kory Cunningham

We are in the last chapter of Acts this morning, Acts chapter 28. We have been studying Acts for a while, walking through Acts. We will land the plane today. We are going to read the last couple of verses just to make sure we get there. As I was thinking about Rome this week, (because Paul is going to land in Rome) I thought back to ten years ago when I got to visit Rome to study a little about church history. One of my professors, Dr. Moore, was obsessed with going and finding a certain painting that is supposed to be the earliest depiction of the cross of Jesus Christ. The painting is called the Alexamenos graffito. It is a picture of Jesus hanging on the cross. It is actually a picture of a man hanging on a cross, but the face is not of a man it's of a donkey. So, there is a guy paying allegiance to this donkey hanging on a cross, and it says, "Alex worships [his] God."

This first depiction of Christ on the cross was not done because some church ordered it to be painted. Instead, it was a buddy making fun of one of his buddies. He got his spray can out and went to a wall in Rome and

spray painted this painting of a cross and a man with a donkey's head. His buddy had told him he should come to worship Jesus. Jesus is the King of kings, Lord of lords. His buddy would have chuckled and said...*uh no, did you miss the memo? That Jesus was crucified on a cross. In case you don't know, kings don't get crucified. Kings do the crucifying.* This picture would tell his buddy...*just in case you missed it, Jesus is not Lord. Caesar is. The power of Rome still rules, so it is laughable that you Christians would join together and worship this guy named Jesus. Obviously, he is not the real king because kings do not die on a cross. Kingdoms come through power. Kingdoms come through conquering. Kings kill. They don't die.*

Yet, we see the beauty of the gospel and the exact opposite happens. In the gospel, we see the Kingdom of Christ come, not through conquering but through crucifixion. It didn't come through killing but through death. The Kingdom of Christ comes by way of the cross. As ironic as it seems that a king would be crucified, we worship that King, Jesus, the crucified king. What we will do this morning is try to hold both of those things together. The reason the picture is funny is because those two don't belong together — if a guy is crucified, he is not the king...if the guy is king, he is not going to be crucified. The reason the joke works, the reason the guy could joke with his buddy, was because the two are supposed to be apart. We will try to do what Paul did, hold those two together. As Christians, we have both a cross and a crown. We have a crucifixion and a Kingdom. What we have is Christ crucified.

Let's go to Acts chapter 28 and we will read the last two verses, just in case you think we are not going to get there. We are going to get there. Let's look at the last two verses of Luke's account of the early Christians, known as Acts. These verses are talking about Paul.

Acts 28:30-31:

He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

We have been walking through Acts. In the last few chapters, we have been following Paul who has been sent from Jerusalem to Rome. He is to stand before Caesar to get his sentencing. He is in trouble. He is a criminal. He is in chains. He is a prisoner. He has been on this boat ride for a while. He was tossed into the sea and the boat crashed in Malta. Now we will see that he gets from the island of Malta to his destination, Rome. We will see Paul in Rome. We will end the narrative of the early church. As we read this narrative, this is what I want you to think about. Usually, at the end of a narrative, a book, the writer will try to remind us of the really important things. We will see at the end of this narrative, and it will be repeated twice, that Paul taught two things, the Kingdom and Christ. We will see that as believers we are to hold those things in tension with one another. Yes, we live in a Kingdom and we also proclaim a cross. Let's walk through this story. Let's look in verses 11 through 16.

Acts 28:11-16:

After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.

Paul's ship lands in Italy at Puteoli. They do not go to the main port of Rome. It would probably be really busy, really hectic there so they land at Puteoli, as many sailors would do. Upon arriving at Puteoli, they go up to Three Taverns and then to the Forum. Scripture tells us that when they get there, they stay seven days with the brothers. The Forum and Three Taverns were like a marketplace and pub scene. There would be food places where people would come and gather. It was a port city. People are

coming into Rome. A lot of business is happening here. It was a place where people would meet and be social. When Paul got to these places (now, this is really important), on seeing them Paul thanked God and took courage. Now, why is that so important? First of all, we already have believers in Rome. The gospel would have already gotten to Rome. There were already believers there, so it is not just the apostles taking the gospel. It is regular Christians taking the gospel to their neighbors and those neighbors taking the gospel to their neighbors. We see the gospel was already in Rome. There are already brothers and sisters in Christ in Rome. When Paul gets to this certain place (he is a prisoner who has been on a ship for a long journey), the brothers come as far as the Forum and the Three Taverns. This tells us that they had made a long journey. They probably walked forty miles from outside of Rome just to meet Paul, to be there in his presence so that he could see them face to face. Paul has been writing letters to this church. They, in turn, had probably written letters back to Paul. They had been corresponding, keeping up with each other. Now, something different happens. Paul sees them face to face. When Paul saw them, he gave thanks to God and he took courage. What does this tell us? It tells us this huge truth. Presence is precious. You showing up and being near somebody, being close to somebody, actually matters. Now, I can guarantee you, having gone through the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021, if those two years hadn't happened, I could have skipped over this verse thinking that is very nice. Having gone through Covid, through our isolation, I feel the weight of what Paul said. He has been on a ship away from believers. He had been on a ship, somewhat by himself in some ways, and now believers are coming to him. They are in his space. They are rubbing shoulders with him and giving him hugs. He is thanking God and is taking courage. Presence is precious. When we show up in real bodies amongst real people, it really does matter.

I can say that presence matters because two years ago we sat with a little iPhone on this stage. It was, in some ways, easier because we only did one sermon. It was limited to about twenty-five minutes because we knew the attention span on a couch with kids was a lot less. In front of this iPhone, we would sing a few songs followed by about a twenty-five minutes sermon. Nobody was here. It was Dad, Matt, and me with Scott behind us,

and Scott was eating a doughnut while I was giving this little talk. I would give this talk into this tiny camera, preaching my heart out for twenty-five minutes, and then I would go home. I didn't know this at the time, but about six months in, I would go home exhausted. I would go home spiritually drained, much more than when I preach three sermons to you guys, right now, right here. Why was that? You guys showing up today encourages me. You really do. You coming and being here in this place encourages me because I have done it the other way, which is not fun. Ministering and preaching to people who are not here is not fun.

Paul had been writing letters but they were not there. Now, he meets them face to face. They are in his face. What does he do? He thanks God...*I thank God for you brothers who took the time to actually come here, to be with me, and walk with me down this road. You are going along my journey with me.* Presence is precious. You showing up here is an encouragement because you came. Just showing up in this place and sitting beside someone — you have encouraged them, maybe, without even knowing it. They may have walked through a lot of isolation this week. They may have been in some hard places. Their work environment may not be super friendly to Christians. They came here and you sit beside them, you go to Sunday school class with them, share a cup of coffee and a doughnut with them in the foyer. That actually matters more than you can know because presence is precious. It's precious.

Some of you are watching online. I want to speak to you as an online watcher. Some of you are watching because it is the right thing to do. You are in a certain situation. Maybe you are a shut-in and you can't physically get here. We praise God for the online services. Maybe you are a visitor. You have heard about this crazy place called Hardin. You decide that you will watch first before going. That's great. We are happy that you watch. We encourage you, as congregants, to share our messages for visitors to watch, to see who we are. There are a lot of reason you may be watching online. Maybe you are traveling. Maybe you are on vacation. You are going somewhere and you can't be here. There are some of you who are not here only because it is convenient not to be here. I want to speak to you very lovingly. I know you are at home thinking it doesn't really matter

because you are getting the message, you are worshipping. I want to say, it does matter. If you would come, you would encourage me. If you would come, it would encourage the people who are here. You can't imagine how just your presence in this place changes things. Paul said that he sees them and he gives thanks. He is encouraged and continues along. That is a big deal. Paul seeing these people, being in their space, encourages him. He is the Apostle Paul. Why does he need encouragement? He is fearless! No, he is timid just as we are. He is anxious just like we are. He is scared just like we are. You know what? Some people made the journey to show up and be with him, to say hi to him, to rub shoulders with him. Their presence was precious to him. He thanked God for them.

We have all sorts of conveniences today. Yes, it is more convenient not to come. We question, what does it really matter? It matters because presence is precious. There is a rhythm that God has designed for us as a church, to gather on the first day of the week. We gather to encourage, to equip, and to spur one another on to good works. We come to gather to one another. That is a really important part of this thing called the church. I want to say thank you for being here because I remember what it was like when you weren't here. I was discouraged a lot of Sundays. You being here is an encouragement to me. If you are at home and have not come back yet, I want to encourage you. Easter is coming up. We would love to have you come for Palm Sunday, come for Easter, come back. We talk to people in the community who say, "I am not sure. Do you still wear masks? Do you still social distance?" No, those things are no longer in place. We are quite open and we invite you to come back. Your presence here is precious. Paul, because he rubbed shoulders, could keep going. I want you to know that one of the important parts that you play as the body of Christ is when you come and look at people in the eye and rub shoulders with other people. You are encouraging them. And, guess what? They are encouraging you. Both things are happening at the same time.

So, Paul has gotten into this little huddle and now he is ready to go. He is going to fulfill his mission. Notice what is written in verse 17. Paul goes to the Jews. He loved the Jews. He loved his fellow people.

Acts 28:17-22:

After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, "Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar – though I had no charge to bring against my nation. For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain." And they said to him, "We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against."

Paul is in Rome and who does he go to first? He goes to the Jews because he loves his fellow people. He loves his Jewish brothers and sisters. I am like...*Paul, are they not the ones who have you in chains? When you were in Jerusalem, you tried to love your own people. They put you on trial. You were forced to go on a ship because they wanted you dead. This is how Israel treated you.* But Paul puts all that behind him. When he gets to Rome, the first people he wants to go to are his own people, the Jews. He wants them to have hope. He wants them to have Jesus. Here we see Paul willing to suffer for their salvation. Notice what he says in verse 20, "Because of the hope of Israel, I am wearing this chain." Paul is chained to a guard. He has some liberties. He gets to have his own place, his own house. But this comes with a guard that he is chained to. It is kind of great, but also not so great. There are limitations. He said that the reason he is wearing this chain is because of his hope for them. Pull that statement apart...*If I didn't have hope for you, if I didn't want you to experience the hope that I have, I wouldn't have this chain on me. I would be living my own life, doing my own thing. I would be a church planter in Ephesus because it is a little easier to rally the Gentiles who have a*

thousand gods and say, OK, one more, who cares. To the Jews, it is a little different. It got him in trouble. So, now he is wearing a chain because he is trying to get his Jewish brothers and sisters to see that Jesus is their hope. Jesus is the Messiah. They need to come to Christ. Because of his hope for his people, he is wearing this chain. This tells us that if he had elected to neglect his people, he would not have a chain on. He would be living his life in comfort, doing what he wanted to do. Rather, he is being dragged to Rome on a ship and will probably go to prison and die very soon. He has a chain on because he has hope for them. Paul is suffering so that others could experience salvation. I don't think that stops with Paul. I think it also goes to us. Are we, as Christians, willing to suffer so that others would find salvation? That was Paul. He was wearing a chain so that others could know the hope of Jesus.

I can think about so many people in church history, and in this church, who have suffered in a great way to get the gospel to people who need it. This week, our college teams went to Nicaragua and Arizona. We have been going to Arizona for a number of years. The reason we go there is because Eric and Brittany Gibbs are there with Live Love Ministries. I grew up with Brittany. Her dad is a deacon. My dad is a pastor. We grew up together. Eric came along in our high school days and we became buddies. I grew up with these two people that I love with all my heart. We did life together. We started having kids at the same time. All of these things happened with our families intertwined. Then, they had this desire to leave Marshall County, to leave their house, to leave their families, to leave the future they would have here, a future that was normal, what everyone was going for. But they had a calling to go to a people they didn't know, a people in Arizona, Native Americans living on a reservation. They are hopeless and we have hope. We have hope and want to take it to a people without hope. They left everything and moved their family, and they have grown their family in Arizona. When they got to Arizona, they were not welcomed with open arms. They are the weird white people on the reservation. They came in, and through labor, love, and years of rejection, finally came to a place where the Native American people accepted them and began to love them. They get to share the gospel. They get to plant churches. Eric got to become a pastor. Now, we get to send missionaries there and groups there

to do work. Why? Because Eric and Brittany said that they were willing to suffer because someone else needed salvation. You can see this all throughout our church history. Many couples and families from our own church have made that ultimate sacrifice to sell and go somewhere.

Paul was doing that. Paul expected every Christian, in some way, to be doing that. In some way, we all have responsibilities to suffer so others would seek salvation — that we would not just live a comfortable life that is all about self. Not every decision should be about me or based on what is best for me and my little Kingdom. Instead, we should make decisions based in some way on others, based on getting the good news of Jesus to others. The way we spend our money, the way we spend our time, the way we spend our days should be in some way allowing us to say we are suffering a little bit so that others would see the salvation of God. Paul says I am wearing a chain because I love you, and if I didn't love you, I would not have this chain on. Are there people in your life that you can say because of this...I don't like it, but I am doing this because I love you? If not, what is a way that you can go, get a little uncomfortable, so that someone else might find the comfort of Christ. You might use your home so that someone else might see the love of Christ. Paul said that he was suffering but it was because he loved them and had a hope that they need. We should be the people who are willing to take hope to people, even when it is uncomfortable and even when we might suffer a little for it.

The Jews said we don't know a lot about you, Paul. Nobody has sent us letters about you. We are not sure about this sect. Could you tell us about it? This would be like asking Marty about Racer basketball. Well, you better buckle up because it will be a long story. Paul, can you tell us about the gospel? Yes, here we go. Paul wants to tell these people the good news of Jesus Christ.

Acts 28:23:

When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the Kingdom of God and trying

to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.

From morning to evening, Paul spoke to them. They didn't know what they were asking. *Hey, Paul, could you tell us about this sect?—Yes, we are going to have a Jesus conference at my house. Come early and we will be here late.* From morning until evening, all day long, he is telling the Jews about the Kingdom of God.

The Jews said they had heard some things about this sect. That is what outsiders called Christianity. It is a cult thing. It is a really weird thing. You have to celebrate this guy who was crucified. You eat flesh together. It is really weird. That was the rumor of Christianity. All day and all night, Paul expounds and explains to them. He reasons with them. He testifies, persuading them about two things, the Kingdom of God and Jesus. Notice he does both of those things. It is really important for our time together because, at times, I feel that we don't put these two together. Sometimes we think these things are at odds with one another. We have the cross of Christ and we have the Kingdom of God, and these are two different things. If you focus on one, you will negate the other. A lot of times, in church, we separate these two things. I want you to see how important it is for these two things to go together. We have both Christ, we have Jesus, we have the cross, but we also have the Kingdom of God. One of the ways we can see that this is really important is because Luke talks about it twice. We read the last two verses at the beginning of the message. Luke talks about the Kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. He talked about both of those things. Let's go back to Acts chapter 1. Look with me at verses 1–3. Let's look at how Luke bookends his letter. When you start with something and end with the same thing, it is probably important. Let's see what that something is.

Acts 1:1-3:

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up, after He had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after

His suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the Kingdom of God.

Jesus, after His suffering (the cross), after His resurrection, spent forty days teaching about the Kingdom of God. That tells me the Kingdom of God is really important to Jesus. He spent forty days after His death, burial, and resurrection teaching about this one theme, the Kingdom of God. The cross led to a Kingdom. Now, at the end of Acts, Paul is teaching not only about Jesus and the cross, he is talking about a Kingdom that came through that guy, Jesus, who died on a cross. We see that both of things are really, really important.

I want to share a quote by Jeremy Treat who writes for 9Marks, "The polarization of these two biblical themes leads to divergent approaches: cross-centered theology that focuses on the salvation of sinners or Kingdom-minded activism that seeks to change the world." You have the Kingdom of God and you have the cross of Christ. Treat says when you separate these two you have two different views of what the point is of these two views. You have cross-centered theology that focuses on the salvation of sinners or Kingdom-minded activism that seeks to change the world. He is saying that when you separate the cross and the Kingdom, you get two different versions of what we are supposed to be doing as Christians. One version is you are all about the Kingdom. We are Kingdom-minded. What is the point of the Kingdom? We are supposed to fulfill that prayer of Jesus asking the Father to make earth as it is in heaven. We are supposed to pray heaven down to earth, that earth would become like heaven. So, if you are about the Kingdom, your focus is all about making the earth like heaven. That is the goal. This often turns into activism. Every way the earth is not like heaven, we have to go and fix those problems. We become focused on fixing the world so that the world would be a better place. That is when you are only about the Kingdom. For the church, then, the only point of their ministry is a mercy ministry. The only point of their ministry is to fix the social ills of our world. That would make the world like heaven.

You have the other view, which is cross-centered. This is, probably, where we fit in a little more as evangelicals. We love the cross. We celebrate the

cross, and we should, but when we only think about the cross, our goal is not to make earth like heaven but about getting earth people to heaven. That is the only goal. What is the mission? Earth people need to go to heaven. Tell them the gospel so that when they die, they will go to heaven. That becomes our whole message. That becomes the whole gospel. Christ died in your place for your sins. If you believe in Him, you will be forgiven and you will go to heaven. What you need is heaven. Here is how you get there. Once they have accepted Christ, what do you do now? Um...Go tell other earth people how to get to heaven. That's it. That is the whole mission. That is the whole thing. If the only thing is getting earth people to heaven, there is no attempt to make earth a little more like heaven, which is what Jesus actually prayed and told us to pray in the Lord's Prayer. So, when you have one or the other, you become a person that is only concerned about getting people to heaven or you become a person that is only concerned about making earth a little more like heaven. Each of those is only half the truth.

What Jesus did after His suffering was to teach about the Kingdom of God. The whole Scripture is about the Kingdom of God. What is the Kingdom of God? It is God's rule through His people over His world. God is really into that. God is really into ruling His world through His people. That is what Adam and Eve were meant to do when the Kingdom was established. Adam and Eve were to rule the world under God's good word. When they said no, the Kingdom disappeared. The Kingdom fell. When Christ came, He said the Kingdom is now here, repent and believe in the gospel. That now, when you come through a cross and a resurrection, you have now become a people who can live under God's Word, ruling in God's way, over His creation. That is the Kingdom. That means the Kingdom has come and the Kingdom has dawned. See, it is both of those things. We preach Christ crucified to people who need forgiveness. It is through that cross and forgiveness that we remind them they have now come into a Kingdom with a crucified King. Now, you get to live your life under His authority. You get to live your life for His values and God's reasons for this earth, not for your own reasons. So, with only the cross, the goal becomes getting saved and going to heaven. What do you do between these times? Whatever you want. Go live. It doesn't really matter. The whole world is going to blow up

and we will all go to heaven. But when you see these two together, it is about a crucified King. It is about a cross and a Kingdom. We realize that we come to Jesus who died in our place for our sins, but when we are forgiven of our sins, we are brought into a Kingdom where we now live under His rule and his reign. We, actually, do things on this earth that make it a little more like heaven. We get to be the people that bring heaven down to earth because that is how it will end. Heaven will come down to earth and God's reign will be as far as the seas. That is where it is going and we get to, right now, live that out.

Just this week we had a group in Nicaragua. I didn't get to go on the trip and I am a little bummed about that. I did get to participate in some of the planning meetings early on. One of the things I knew they would be doing was food boxes. I have been in Nicaragua several times and have distributed food boxes. They are just great. You take a box full of food, toiletries, cooking oil (basically everything a family will need for an entire month) into their homes and bless them with it. You ask questions about their families. You get to know them, learn their histories, and look at their pictures. You love on these families. At the end, you give them a Bible and share with them the good news of Jesus. When we think about these two divergent theological categories, the cross and the Kingdom, we can miss this as evangelicals. That box we hand to the Nicaraguans really doesn't matter. That box is just an instrument to get to the good. The box is just our way in to do important work. What is the important work? Sharing the gospel of Jesus. This box doesn't matter. Who cares about the box? Let's just get to the message. If we look at the Bible and think about Paul's teachings, he would tell us that the box actually matters a lot. The box matters too!

Now, the box is not more important, it is not as important as the gospel message, but do you know what that box is about? The box is about the Kingdom. That box tells a family that you know things are tough for them. You know they would experience hunger that week and you want them to know that here is a box from God — that He loves them and you love them. That there is a Kingdom that is coming where there will be no more hunger and they will never want again. In that Kingdom, there will be no

more sin and we will live under God's rule and reign forevermore. This box is a reminder of what is to come. This box is, right now, a little taste of that Kingdom where there is no more hunger. See, the box says...*I am not just concerned about your soul getting to heaven. I am worried about your body, right now, rotting. I am interested in that and I want to help you, right now. I want to give you a pair of glasses so that you can see better.* That is Kingdom work that leads to proclaiming the gospel, both of these things in tension together. We don't just give food boxes and glasses. But we don't just preach the gospel. We become the people who do both. We love our neighbors well and at the same time tell the greatest news in the world. It is about a cross and also about a Kingdom.

Then, we see that Paul gets rejected, as he often did. Some of them were convinced but others were not.

Acts 28:25b-27:

The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: "Go to this people, and say, 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.'" For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.

They are not believing. It is not because they can't hear correctly or see correctly. It is because they have dull hearts. They have hearts that are unrepentant, hearts that will not turn. If they would turn, God would forgive and heal them.

Acts 24:28:

Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been set to the Gentiles; they will listen.

So Israel, what you will reject, your so-called enemies, the Gentiles you despise, will hear it, and accept it. They will come into the Kingdom. Here we are, primarily a bunch of Gentiles living in the Kingdom of God because

we listened to the gospel. We had hearts that repented. And then, Luke ends like this.

Acts 28:30-31:

He lived there two whole years at his one expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Again, Luke ends with what Paul was doing, teaching and proclaiming, not just a cross and not just a Kingdom, but proclaiming the Kingdom of God through the Lord Jesus Christ. I think this is the first time Luke used that whole phrase, the Lord Jesus Christ, in Acts, the whole title. He is the Lord. He is Yahweh. He is the God who created the cosmos. He is the Lord to whom every knee will bow to. His name is Jesus. By the way, He is the Christ, a title from the Old Testament meaning He is the anointed King. Who is Jesus? He is the King. He is not just the King. He is the crucified King. He is the crucified King that brought a Kingdom. See, Jesus showed up after suffering and showed Himself, having died and risen again and said, now, let me tell you about the Kingdom. Let me tell you about how life is supposed to be lived. Let me tell you about a life where you love God and you love neighbor above self. Let me tell you about a life where it is blessed to mourn, it is blessed to hunger. Let me tell you about a life that is not lived to the world values but is lived under God's rule and reign, about a life that is coming that speaks about goodness and joy forevermore.

Christ wanted His followers to come through a cross but walk into a Kingdom and enjoy that Kingdom as kings and queens of that Kingdom, ruling all the spaces you go to, today and tomorrow. As you walk into work, you are a royal priesthood. You are a Kingdom of priests. You get to walk in there, ruling and reigning over your little part of the world. How? Under God's good Word, loving others, being generous, forgiving, giving grace, being an encouragement. You get to show everyone around you what the Kingdom of God is like. Paul wants to make sure those two things go together, two things that seem like they are so far apart. A teenager

could spray paint a cross on a wall in Rome and say here is your king. That king is depicted as a donkey because only so-called kings, only false kings die on a cross. By the way, Caesar is the real king. He rules forevermore.

Let's go back to the little teenager with the spray can — You know, Caesar is long dead. You know Rome that you thought was so powerful? We visit it, now, as tourist, walk through the rubble. You know that donkey you thought died on the cross? He wasn't a donkey. He was the Son of God. His name is Jesus. And, guess what. He is the King...but not a king like you think. Kings usually come by conquering. Kings usually come by killing. This King came through weakness. He didn't come through conquering. He came through crucifixion. He didn't come by killing. He came through death. He is the King, a crucified King. The only way to get into His Kingdom is not through power, might, and privilege but through humbly repenting and coming through your own cross and walking out of your own empty tomb. That is the path into the Kingdom. You get power when you submit to weakness.

It looked like a painting that made fun of somebody, but the kid didn't know how true it was. Yes, he is the King who died on a cross. But on the cross, He became the crucified King. Through His resurrection, He brought a Kingdom that will live forevermore. We, church, proclaim both of those things. We hold those things together. Yes, we tell people about the cross of Christ where they can have forgiveness and reconciliation to God. That is deeply important. Also, we tell them about the Kingdom of God where they now live under the rule and reign of Christ. They get to participate in making this earth a little bit more like it is heaven. It is both of those things. Both of those things are the beauty of the gospel.

Luke doesn't really end it. He just tells us that Paul is teaching and proclaiming with boldness, without hindrance. It just ends. And I am like what happens to Paul? This is a story about Paul where Luke doesn't even say how it ends. We do have church history and we can read how Paul's life ended. But Luke does not include it here. Why doesn't he end Paul's story? Because Acts is not about Paul's story. It is not about the Acts of the apostles. They all die but the story doesn't end with them. Acts is really about the acts of the Holy Spirit working in broken people who get to build

the Kingdom of God. The reason Luke doesn't tell us how Paul's life ended is because Paul's life is not the end of the story. The story doesn't die with Paul. The story is still going. Why? Because the story is also ours. It is not Paul's story. It is not Peter's story. It is our story. It is a story of the church. It invites us in to see what Paul is doing. At the end, he is proclaiming the gospel, the Kingdom, and the cross. And it doesn't end, meaning that we, as the reader, ask the question what next? What happens next? Luke would say...*I don't know. I am not getting to live that long. It is your time. You do what is next. You fill in the rest of the pages.* See, it is not a story that ends with a period after Paul. It is a story that continues through you and me. And, guess what? It is not a story that will end with our death either. It is a story that lives on past us. It is a story of the church. It is a story of the Kingdom. That Kingdom comes by way of the cross. How the story ends is up to us. Let's continue to write that story.