

The Consistent Christian Life

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[0 : 00] Now we are all lured in by the promise of quick fixes, aren't we? So we live in a world that wants things immediately and without much effort.

So maybe you're like me and you're lured in by the promise of six pack abs in 60 days from someone who looks very athletic in the video. I'm pretty sure it's just the lighting.

Maybe you want to lose weight and so you're pulled in by those adverts that speak about the next superfood or that fruit that basically burns fat as you chew. Maybe it's that cleaning product that promises to get away that stain that you've had on the carpet for 30 odd years.

Or maybe it's that new kitchen appliance that the person on TV says you cannot live without. Or it's that face cream that promises to keep wrinkles at bay until your dying day.

We all love a quick fix. But in reality, these kind of overnight success ideas, whilst they feed or desire for things to be done quickly, with minimal effort and with so-called guaranteed outcomes, they don't or they very rarely actually work.

[1 : 14] Because people achieve goals not by going with the newest quick fix fad or trend, but we achieve things by consistency. The key to getting better at something or achieving a certain goal that you have is not a quick dash, it's not a sprint, but the consistent, dedicated discipline of hard work that will get you there.

Ask any doctor, any bricklayer, any plasterer, any muscly person, they will tell you that the key to their achievements and the place they are in their careers or their appearance, whatever it may be, the key is consistency.

And the same is true for the Christian life. Because if we want to grow spiritually as a whole church family, if we want to become a church family that is rooted in the Bible, that has a desire to see the kingdom of God grow, if we want our faith as individuals to grow into maturity, then we need to be consistent.

This morning, as we conclude our series in Acts, I want us to think about what that looks like. What is the consistent Christian life? In our short passage for today, we see three things that make up a consistent Christian life.

And all of these things have come up in the book of Acts before, but now we see them all in one place. And so this morning we sit with Paul, who is still a prisoner, and we can learn that even now, right at the end, he has remained consistent in his walk with Jesus.

[2 : 50] What a wonderful thing to be considering today, as Jack has publicly declared his faith in Jesus. Now he's not here. Oh no, there he is. Jack, as you know, the Christian life will not be easy.

Many bumps and obstacles will come in your way, and many people in this room can attest to that. But out of your love for Jesus, and out of your desire to serve him, live the consistent life until Jesus returns, or you are called home.

And my prayer is that each of us would do the same as we go through this life. So here are three things that will help us consistently live the Christian life from the end of Acts chapter 28.

The first thing that we see is that like Paul, we should make the most of every opportunity in verses 17 to 23. So we need to remember that Paul has been in chains since chapter 21.

He's been a prisoner. And as we saw last week with Ian, he eventually did travel all the way to Rome. Now whilst in prison, Paul wrote some of his letters to different churches, and we get a glimpse of how he was doing, what his priority was as he was imprisoned.

[4 : 07] Now I know that if I was wrongly imprisoned, on false charges that had no basis, I would be pleading my innocence non-stop, trying to convince my captors that they had the wrong guy, that I should be released.

That's probably everyone's natural response, right? But what does Paul do? Well, we get a glimpse in Colossians chapter 4, verse 2, where Paul's writing to a church, and this is what he says. Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful, and pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. So as Paul is sitting in chains in Rome, most likely chained to a soldier, his prayer request isn't that these chains would be gone, isn't that he'd be found innocent, but he asks that the church would pray, that he would publicly and correctly make Jesus known to all those around him.

Paul is living consistently, whether in chains or a free man, he always made the most of every opportunity to share Jesus. And he does the same in Acts chapter 28.

[5 : 23] Look at verse 17 with me that we read earlier. Three days later, he, that's Paul, called together the local Jewish leaders. So not only was Paul under house arrest, as verse 16 says, which would probably mean a rotation of guards who were quite literally a captive audience to the message of Jesus.

Verse 30 also says that he had visitors who came to the house who wanted to see him. And then in verse 17, he gathers local Jews to talk to them.

So even in Rome, where he is in chains on false accusations from some Jews, even here he's trying to reach them with the message of Jesus. So Paul meets the Jews first in verse 17 at his own request.

And then again, a second time in verse 23 at their request. And this time it's a bigger crowd. Every opportunity Paul gets, he uses to share the gospel.

Now, so often we wait for the so-called perfect conditions to share Jesus with people, don't we? We almost want people to come up to us and ask us, well, why do you believe in Jesus?

[6 : 33] But realistically, that won't happen all that often. Instead, we should be living the consistent Christian life and making the most of every opportunity.

Telling people that we were at church on the weekend and what we were thinking about. Opening up about your struggles and how Jesus has helped you or is helping you through the storms of life. Explaining to people why you won't participate in certain activities or behaviors. explaining why you hold certain viewpoints on political or cultural issues.

These are simple ways that we can make the most of every opportunity to share Jesus. But it also means standing up for our faith and taking opportunities to speak about Jesus, even in difficult circumstances.

In verse 22, the Jews say that they hear people everywhere talking against this sect, meaning Christianity. And yet Paul continues to speak, as verse 31 says, with boldness and without hindrance.

[7 : 40] Now we've seen that before. Remember in Acts chapter 21, after a big crowd started trying to beat Paul to death, what did he do? When he was saved by the Roman soldiers, he stopped and said, can I please speak to the crowd?

And he started to teach them about Jesus. What does he do whilst he's a prisoner time and time again, as Paul has his back up against it? Threats coming at him from every side.

He consistently lived the Christian life, made the most of every opportunity to share Jesus. And we should do the same. Make the most of every opportunity.

And the second thing we see to help us consistently live the Christian life that we see in Paul here is that we should teach everyone about Jesus.

Verses 23 to 31. As has happened before in Acts 13, the second time the Jews come to see Paul, a larger crowd appears.

[8 : 40] We see that in verse 23. So it's the Jews who arranged this second meeting because they're intrigued by what Paul thinks and want to hear him speak. So what does he do?

Well, he talks to them in verse 20. He said in verse 23, it says, he witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God and from the law of Moses and from the prophets, he tried to persuade them about Jesus.

Now notice two key things about Paul's witnessing to these people in that verse. He spoke to them from morning till night and from cover to cover. This week at weekend at the holiday club that we've already heard about, Jack and I were leading a discussion group together.

And one of the questions we asked the children was, if someone came to you and asked you to tell them about Jesus, what would you say? Now they gave some really good answers, most of them really helpful.

But it probably took about three or four minutes and they were done. Often people are taught today to be able to share their story of how they came to know Jesus in three minutes. That is a good thing to do.

[9 : 50] But that's not what Paul does here. See, he doesn't give a short gospel presentation. He doesn't give his listeners a quick two ways to live booklet. Instead, he spends hours talking to these people about Jesus, explaining about the kingdom of God.

Paul takes his time to explain God's great plan. Now we will most likely never be in a context to do this. I don't know anyone who will sit and have an engaged conversation about one topic or about something from morning until evening.

But we can spend time with our non-Christian friends and family members and teach them about God. Invest in them. Talk about why we believe what we do, why we hold certain positions.

Because witnessing to someone isn't a parachute situation where you mention Jesus, you maybe even quote John 3.16 and then you're out the door again. Paul is investing time in these people and telling them about Jesus from morning till evening.

But notice the second thing is that he does it from cover to cover. Paul doesn't just mention one little thing or one aspect of the gospel that is maybe bite-sized or easy to handle.

[11 : 09] But instead he sits them down for a very long Bible study. So often I hear people say that we only need to tell people that God is love. And that is right. God is love.

And we do need to tell people that. But if we are to faithfully witness about God and teach everyone about Jesus, then we need to be holistic in our witnessing.

So yes, we share that God is love. We also share that God is just, that God is good, and that God is judge. We need to share with people from Genesis to Revelation, the whole counsel of God.

And that means that we need to know our Bibles. One of the most encouraging things when I do house visits is sitting with someone who's elderly and they pull out their Bible that has clearly been used and it is in bits.

So encouraging. We have the immense privilege of having God's word in so many accessible ways today. We should use all of them for our own spiritual benefit, but also so that we can faithfully point people to Jesus from the beginning of the Bible to the end of God's big story.

[12 : 21] It is an absolute joy to be used by God to share the good news of Jesus. We sit here as a result of that this morning. Remember way back in the beginning of Acts chapter 1, the early church started with a small group in an upper room, but through the power of God, through a wonderful work of the Holy Spirit, through the efforts of God's people constantly sharing the gospel, we sit here having heard about Jesus.

We are here as a result of what we see in the book of Acts. Now we can read Acts, which is a historical account of the beginning of the church. We can read the truth that the gospel grows as it is opposed and we can see God at work in wonderful ways, but it didn't stop in Acts chapter 28, verse 31, because the same thing happens today.

The Lord continues to work and the gospel continues to go forth as men and women, through the power of the Spirit, share Jesus with the world. And the responses will be the same now as they were back then.

Look with me at verse 24. Some were convinced by what he, that's Paul, said, but others would not believe. They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul made his final statement. Paul goes on to quote from Isaiah, highlighting that these people had eyes to see the signs. They had ears to hear the message of Jesus and yet their hearts were hard.

[13 : 59] They were unwilling to see the work of God that was happening right in front of them. They were unwilling to listen to the truth of Jesus and repent and put their trust in him.

Now as we go out into this world and we share the gospel with people, there will be those who respond with faith and we greatly rejoice at that new life. There will also be those who reject the gospel and that is not on us.

God is the one who brings about salvation. We just have the privilege of sharing Jesus with others. Living the consistent Christian life looks like making the most of every opportunity.

It looks like teaching everyone about Jesus. And the third thing that we see in these verses is that to live the consistent Christian life we need to remember that the gospel comes with a house key. Look at verses 30 to 31 with me. For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him.

[15:02] He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. For two years Paul was under house arrest using the opportunity to teach those who visited him but also using it to write a lot.

While he was in Rome he wrote the New Testament letters of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. So even in the midst of all of Paul's limitations being under house arrest, under constant supervision, he wouldn't have been in a big mansion that would have allowed tons of people to come visit him all at once.

But none of that stopped him. Paul used to travel from town to town, from synagogue to synagogue. He couldn't do that anymore. He's stuck in one place. Now he could have seen all of that as a hindrance to his ministry.

He could have given up. He could have retreated into isolation, thrown down his tools, but instead he embraced it and used the circumstances that he was in to continue to share Jesus through hospitality for two years.

He welcomed and he witnessed. He used the means that he had to proclaim the kingdom of God and teach people about Jesus. Now maybe you live alone.

[16:26] Maybe you think that you can't cook amazing food. Maybe you have a tiny dining room. Maybe you don't even have a dining room. None of those things are limitations to stop you inviting people into your life and sharing the gospel with them.

Some of the best conversations I've had with people are sitting on a couch with a TV in the background with a takeaway on my knees or a cup of tea in my hand or a glass of water.

We don't need to meet certain criteria to share Jesus in our homes. We can use what God has given us to welcome and witness.

Paul wasn't the only one who did this. Jesus, most of Jesus' conversations about the kingdom of God and his teachings happened in hospitality settings around a dinner table or over a meal.

See, we can look at people like Paul and maybe some of the well-known evangelists today and think that there's something special about them. That they're doing the work so I can sit back and relax and do nothing.

[17:34] The reality is that every single Christian has a unique opportunity to reach certain groups of people. You'll rob shoulders with your friends and family and I'll rob shoulders with mine.

I probably won't be able to reach the wealthy businessman working in a law firm down on Lothian Road but you might. I won't have the opportunity to sit next to your colleagues at work in the lunch break during a lunch break but you do.

I won't have the chance to speak to your friend who is struggling and looking for hope in life but you do. Your life and your home provides you with the perfect opportunity to live the Christian life.

As you remember the gospel comes with a house key and you boldly without hindrance proclaim the kingdom of God and teach people about Jesus. Verse 31 is the final thing said about Paul in Acts.

It's a summary sentence of his last two years the last two years of his life. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

[18:47] Now I wonder if you asked someone to summarize the last two years of your life in a sentence or two what would they say? Is the first thing that would come to mind that they would say about you that you proclaim the kingdom of God with all boldness?

Is that a determining factor in your life? Or would it be that you're a nice person who's managed to perfect a new skill over lockdown? Or would it be that you're a busy person who still tries to make time to see other people?

I would love it if all of our lives could be summarized by people saying that we are men and women who love the Lord who love his word who love his church who love the lost and who spent their time proclaiming Jesus to a world that is dying without him.

This might sound like a really funny way to end the book of Acts. There's no mention of Paul meeting the church in Rome. No mention of his trial before Caesar.

No mention of his death either. And I think Luke has done that deliberately to take the focus off of Paul and instead to focus on the continued work of the spread of God's word.

[20 : 05] You know those series you see on television or you watch online? You get to that final episode of the series where everything's been building up to this point. You're waiting for the conclusion and then it says to be continued and you scream at the telly.

Verse 31 is basically a big to be continued sign because the focus through our Acts has been the spread of God's word, the spread of the gospel. We see in Acts chapter 6 verse 7 in chapter 9 verse 31 in chapter 12 verse 24 in chapter 16 verse 5 in chapter 19 verse 20 time and time again the focus has been on the gospel spreading and it's always been the consistent same message of Jesus Christ.

No frills, no softening it, no sugarcoating it but simply presenting the good news of Jesus to the world and leaving the results up to God.

Friends, as we go into this world and we try to live the Christian life we need to know the gospel. We never graduate from the gospel but we should and we shouldn't be promoting any other messages but consistently telling people the same message that everyone is born into this life in rebellion against God.

Naturally his enemies and deserving of his wrath that nobody can save themselves. We can never be good enough or do enough to be right with God on our own but God sent his son Jesus to take the punishment that we all deserve so that all those who believe in him are forgiven and made right with God.

[21 : 51] Jesus died on the cross dying the death that we all deserve. He rose victorious from the grave defeating sin defeating death and has gone to the Father in heaven where he is preparing a place for his people and one day when he returns all the Lord's people will gather in his presence for eternity and all those who reject Jesus will in this life will spend eternity under the just wrath of God.

You see the end of Acts is just the end of the beginning of the story. The story of the spread of God's word continues today as Christians go out and consistently live the Christian life.

As Jack as we all go into our work our friend circles our families as we make the most of every opportunity as we teach everyone about Jesus and as we remember that the gospel comes with a house key.

See we're all lured in by the promise of a quick fix. We live in a world that want things that want things immediately without much effort whether that's getting six pack abs the newest kitchen gadget or a miracle cleaning product we love a quick fix but they rarely work because the key is consistency.

That's how we become better at our jobs that's how we achieve the things we want and it's also how we continue to grow and mature in our faith as we consistently live the Christian life.

[23 : 28] That is how God's word spreads. See the book of Acts is a snapshot of how the early church grew and it should encourage us encourage us to see how great our God is and encourage us to continue that work for him and for his glory.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father we thank you for the immense privilege it is to be your witnesses in this world.

Father we thank you for the book of Acts and all the things we've been learning over the months that we've been in this series but Lord we pray that by your spirit you would enable us to remember everything that we learn not only to remember it but also to put it into practice that we would be your witnesses in Edinburgh in our workplaces in our family circles and in our friend circles would we point people to you with that same consistent message of Jesus Christ.

Father would you help us grow in our love for you our love for your church our love for your word and our love for the lost people of this world.

In Jesus name we pray Amen.