



"PREACHING THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND
TEACHING THINGS ABOUT THE LORD
JESUS CHRIST WITH ALL OPENNESS,
UNHINDERED."
- ACTS 28:31

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B.O.T.M
BOOK OF THE MONTH
2026

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Week 2 - "Grace Greater Than Boundaries"

Acts 14:1-15:35

UNHINDERED: The Gospel on the Move

Sunday, August 9, 2026 · Cross Central

The Question Underneath Everything

This morning's sermon began with a question that sounds simple but isn't: what do you have to do to belong to God?

Most of us carry an answer more complicated than we'd like to admit. We know the theological answer: grace, faith, Jesus...but the functional answer, the one that actually drives how we think about ourselves and others in relation to God, tends to have more items on the list. Be sincere enough. Attend church often enough. Always be "winning" and being "blessed." Have 'our' correct doctrine and theology.

Almost always without noticing, we tend to add things.

Acts 14 and 15 is the story of the first time the early church was forced to stop and formally answer that question. The answer they arrived at, fought for, debated, prayed over, and finally declared, is one of the most important statements in the whole New Testament. But before we reach the council in Jerusalem, Luke takes us on a very important road.

The Road That Tests the Question

From Pisidian Antioch, where they were expelled last week, Paul and Barnabas move east along the Via Sebaste to Iconium, where the same pattern immediately repeats: belief and opposition, arriving together. They stay a long time, preaching boldly about the grace of the Lord. Eventually a plot to stone them forces them out, and they move on to Lystra.

In Lystra a man who has never walked jumps to his feet. The crowd immediately tries to worship Paul and Barnabas as Zeus and Hermes. Paul tears his clothes and runs into the crowd shouting: "We are merely human beings — just like you." He doesn't start with Scripture but with rain and harvest, the evidence of God already present in what these people already know. And the same crowd that nearly worshipped him ends the week stoning him and leaving him for dead outside the city gates.

Paul gets up. And goes back into the city.

The next day they leave for Derbe, the easternmost point of the journey. The road home goes east, through Tarsus, safe and logical. They don't take it. They retrace every step back through Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch, strengthening the believers in every city that tried to stop them. Some ministry only happens on the second time around.

The Controversy That Had to Be Faced

Back in Antioch, visitors arrive from Judea with a message that lands like a stone: "Unless you are circumcised as required by the law of Moses, you cannot be saved."

This is not a minor theological quibble. It is a message to real people. Gentile believers who have genuinely turned to God, received the Spirit, been baptised, been changed. Now they are being told that what they received is real but insufficient. That grace got them most of the way there, but they need something more. That their belonging to God is conditional in a way they cannot resolve by themselves.

The dispute is sharp enough that it goes to Jerusalem. Peter stands and gives not a theological argument but a testimony: I was there, I saw what God did. He gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles. The same Spirit, in the same

way, before anyone added this requirement. "We are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus."

Then James opens the Scriptures, quoting Amos, written eight centuries earlier, and shows the room that the inclusion of the Gentiles was never a Plan B. It was always where Israel's story was heading. The restoration of David's house was always inseparable from the Gentiles seeking the Lord. And then his verdict, one of the most important sentences in Acts: "We should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God."

The Letter That Brought Relief

The council writes a letter, not adding extra "stuff" for the new believers, but removing the unnecessary weight. "We should not lay any greater burden on you than these few requirements." When it is read aloud in Antioch: great joy. The joy of people hearing that the news they received is still good, without an asterisk, without a condition buried in fine print, without a requirement that some can meet and others can't.

The Hardest Part of Grace

This morning's sermon closed with something worth carrying into the week. The teachers from Judea were not bad people. They were people who had confused the sign with the reality it was pointing to, who had mistaken the boundary markers of their own tradition for God's requirements. Every tradition, including ours, is capable of that confusion.

The council's answer stands across two thousand years: we are not called to make it difficult for people who are turning to God. That is not a low bar. It is a question that asks us to examine every assumption we carry about who is welcome, and to hold each one up against the testimony of what God has already done.

The hardest part of grace is not believing that God is gracious to me. It is believing that God is equally gracious to the people I've quietly decided don't actually qualify.

Where have I added a condition to a gift that was always free?

This Week

Days 10–14 of the reading plan continue through the second half of Acts 15: the Jerusalem letter delivered, the great joy in Antioch, and the community settling into the fullness of what grace has declared over them. Day 15 moves into Acts 16:1–5 as the mission begins to move again, setting up Sunday's sermon which opens in Acts 15:36 with a sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas that nobody saw coming.

If Acts 14 and 15 asked what you have to do to belong to God, Acts 15:36–16:40 asks a different question: what do you do when the road you expected to be on simply doesn't open? Next Sunday, “When God Opens Doors”, we follow Paul through two closed provinces, a vision in the night, a prayer meeting by a river, and a midnight earthquake in a Philippian prison cell. The God who declares grace greater than boundaries turns out to be the same God who redirects, disrupts, and opens doors in places nobody planned to go.

Daily devotions posted every morning at 7am on our Facebook and Instagram accounts and at crosscentral.com.au/unhindered. Discussion questions from this morning's handout are on the website, ready for your Connect Group and Acts Triad this week.

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