

UNSTOPPABLE CHURCH

Then and Now
in 30 Minutes



Episode 39 - Unconstrained

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THE SETTING



“And so we came to Rome” ([Acts 28:14](#)). And so, just like Paul long before us, have we. This episode finds us overlooking **the Forum in Rome**, the very heart of the Roman empire. It was divided into three areas: political, religious, and commercial. As Rome grew, the forum was expanded, with new emperors building their own structures. Among the most notable are: (1) the Temple of Saturn, built in 497 BC in honour of Italy’s fabled god-king. It served as the State treasury and was the site of the annual Saturnalia festival, held on December 17, when slaves were free to do as they wished and gifts were exchanged. The festival was absorbed in later Christian times and re-imagined as Christmas. (2) The Temple of Mars Ultor (the “Avenger”), built by Octavian in 42 BC, following the battle of Philippi, in which Caesar’s assassins, Cassius and Brutus, were defeated and Caesar was “avenged.” This temple was central to foreign policy and closely associated with the military. It was here that the Senate met to discuss the prospect of war. (3) The Julia Curia built by Julius Caesar but completed by Augustus who dedicated it to Julius in 29 BC. He also moved the meeting place of the Senate to this location.

When Paul arrived here, then, he really was at the centre of the world’s power.



View of the Forum, Rome, with pillars from the Temple of Saturn in the foreground



Another view of the Forum with the Arch of Septimius Severus on the left and the Temple of Saturn on the right. The raised wall in the distance marks the Palatine Hill, the location of the various Emperors' private homes



BIBLE READING

[Acts 28:11-31](#)

KEY IDEAS



Locked up, but not locked out

- Arriving in Rome, "Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him." ([v16](#)). In other words, he was under what we would call 'house arrest'. This was not his final imprisonment (referred to in his second letter to Timothy, when he was in the Mamertine Jail, awaiting death (see the next episode for that!))
- He called the Jewish leaders to visit him to explain why he was there (showing that the Emperor Claudius' ban on Jews living in Rome - which had led to Priscilla and Aquilla's expulsion - had now obviously lapsed). They had received no messages about him but wanted to know more about his message and "the sect" he belonged to; so they arranged a bigger meeting with him where 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" ([v23](#)). While some were convinced, others were not; and Paul declared words from Isaiah 6 over them ([v25-28](#)) - in many ways, a summary of what has happened in the whole story of Acts.
- Paul remained under house arrest for the next two years in his private rented house. But it is how Luke sums up those two years that is so impacting; for Paul might have been locked up, but he was not locked out; for "he proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ - with all boldness and without hindrance!" ([v31](#)). Nothing could stop the Kingdom; and nothing could stop Paul. In any and every situation, he was unconstrained.
- But not only did he preach and teach; he also wrote. Indeed, if it hadn't been for this house arrest, we would have a much thinner New Testament. For while here he would write what are often referred to as "the prison epistles":

- o Ephesians, with its theme of God's great purpose for the Church (while imprisoned!)
 - o Philippians, with its theme of the joy of Jesus (while imprisoned!)
 - o Colossians, with its theme of Christ's supremacy over all things (while imprisoned!)
 - o Philemon, with its appeal for a runaway, converted slave (while imprisoned!)
- Truly, nothing could constrain Paul and keep him from his life's calling.



TO THINK ABOUT

1. Paul refused to be constrained by external circumstances; but what about you? How do you respond when things go 'wrong'?
2. What was it that Paul was so convinced about that enabled him to keep going like he did?
3. In what areas does the Church today need to rediscover a sense of being unconstrained and how could that empower it to become unstoppable again?

BONUS CONTENT



For a behind-the-scenes glimpse into what was involved to create this podcast series listen to Mike and David recounting their experiences!

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