

Series - Unhindered

#7 The Unhindered Bible, and Unstoppable Believers

Acts 28:1-31

Introduction: Acts 1:1-2 says the Book of Acts is the story of *"all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up, after he had given instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen."*

It's the story of His disciples being "witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." [Acts 1:8]

We've seen God use people like Peter and John, Stephen, and Philip to perform miracles, healing in the name of Jesus. He used these men to make disciples and start churches and point people to the good news of Jesus!

As you know the book of Acts opens with the command of the Lord Jesus to be witnesses to the end of the earth. The book of Acts closes with the apostle Paul, in the city of Rome, living in his own hired house, proclaiming the Gospel.

Many people who have taught the book of Acts have pointed out that the book ends in a rather unusual way. The last four words in the King James says—'no man forbidding him.' Those words translate into one word in the original language. It is an adverb... "Unhinderedly, or Unhindered."

And that is what I've chosen as our vision theme for this year – UNHINDERED!

There are other reasons that come into play for why the Holy Spirit chose to use the word, "unhindered," to conclude the Book of Acts.

First, it is a word of **completion**. It says to us that Luke accomplished his purpose in writing the book, and we are told what the book is all about: ***You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth*** (Acts 1:8).

Luke traced the movement of the Christian faith from its beginning in the city of Jerusalem to where it was planted in the city of Rome.

Luke said, “I have accomplished my purpose.” It is like a shout of triumph—Unhindered! It is that flag flown high that was planted in the heart of the capital of the ancient world—Unhindered! Paul was a prisoner, but the Word of God is not bound— It is Unhindered!

The evil, persecutor of Christians, Roman emperor, Nero was on the throne, but God is still on His throne—Unhindered! It is a word of completion. No one could hinder the work of the Lord going forward.

Second, it is a word of continuation. The Book of Acts tells us what the Lord intends for the Church to be doing until Jesus Christ returns.

So, it’s a book of continuation. Not in the sense of revelation, but in the sense of continuing to do what God has called us as believers and as a church to do.

We started by taking a journey through the book of Acts, to identify the Five Characteristics of an Unhindered Church. We found that it’s a praying church, a powerful church, a pure church, a persecuted church, and a praising church.

In the last few weeks, I’ve pointed out what our responsibility is to help us get to that place of proclaiming Jesus’ Good News – UNHINDERED.

Get Unshackled from the weight of ANXIETY.

Get Unburdened from the Demands of RELIGION.

Get Untangled from the Dangerous Web of UNBELIEF.

You’ve got to Unlearn What You THINK You Know, so You Can Relearn What You NEED to Know.

Last week Jon’s message was, **Get Undistracted from DISCONTENTMENT.**

In one sense of the word, we should be writing “Acts, chapter 29.” Our CHURCH should be writing a chapter in the history of the Christian church—moving forward to do what the Lord has intended us to do.

Today’s message is, “The Unhindered Bible, and Unstoppable Believers.”

In that atmosphere we come to the last chapter of the book of Acts. Instead of reading it this morning, **I want to show it to you through the Visual Bible-Video**

This last leg of Paul's ministry journey in Acts 28 gives us some important life lessons. I want to apply those lessons to our lives this morning. I want to say to you that in the will of God, following the plan of God, nobody can stop you. The Bible is unhindered, and you are unstoppable doing what God wants you to do.

The first thing I want you to notice is we're UNSTOPPABLE because:

I. We have a GUARDED Life.

Let me read the opening verses of Chapter 28 and show how God guarded the life of the Apostle Paul. Beginning with verse 1, ***"When they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta. 2The natives showed us extraordinary kindness, for they kindled a fire and took us all in because of the rain that had started and because of the cold. 3But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. 4When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." 5However, Paul shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm. 6Now they were expecting that he was going to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god."***

Do you see how his life was guarded? Do you see how God took care of him? How God got him out of the raging sea and the shipwreck and how God guarded him from the bite of this poisonous snake.

God always guards His children. Out of the sea they come to an island. It is the island of Malta. It's about 60 miles south of Sicily. Malta became a British colony in 1815 and from that point on was an important naval base for the British. Malta was one of the most bombed places on earth in WWII. The name Malta doesn't really occur in the Bible because Malta is the Maltese name for the island that the Greeks and Romans called Melite or Melita.

Some say the name of Malta means refuge. Others say, the name Melite literally means **Place of Honey**, which is reminiscent of the Promised Land being a **"land of milk and honey."** The point-God had a Malta for Paul, and he's got one for YOU.

Here's another chapter in the continuing saga of the hardships Paul endured for the Lord. You may remember he escaped in a basket from Damascus. He was stoned in Lystra. He was laughed at in the city of Athens. He was driven out of the city of Ephesus. And now he was shipwrecked in the Mediterranean Sea. But God has a Malta for him. God has a refuge for him.

In every story of the troubled sea of your life, you can be sure that God has a place of milk and honey for you. God will guard your life. God is protecting your life.

The KJV in verse 2 says of the people of Malta, they are barbarous. Don't get the idea that these were wild savages or cannibals. The word just simply means they did not speak the Greek language. In those days, if you didn't speak the Greek language, you were called a barbarian.

They couldn't speak the Greek language, but it is very clear that they spoke the language of kindness because they were kind to Paul. Verse 2 says, ***"The natives showed us extraordinary kindness, for they kindled a fire and took us all in because of the rain that had started and because of the cold."***

In life sometimes it's sad, but true, that lost people can show more kindness when God's people are not as kind as they ought to be. So, Paul is guarded. God has an island of refuge and a place of prosperity for him.

This is a fascinating account, to me because I'm not a big fan of snakes. They build a fire and Paul is doing his part by gathering some sticks to put on the fire. The Bible says there was a poisonous snake in those sticks, and it bit Paul on the hand. Verse 4 says, ***"When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live."***

Then, would you believe it? He shook it off his hand and he didn't feel any harm. I heard a message from an old preacher using this account, and the title of his message was ***"if you can't shake it, you won't make it."***

Do you remember in Mark 16, Jesus said that his apostles, in carrying out the gospel mandate, that if they took up serpents, they would not harm them. Here is a fulfillment of that promise.

This is not permission for Christians to get out of the will of God. Nor is this permission to have snake handling services. [snake story]

This is just another example that when you are in God's will, God will guard you. It means that God will protect you and that God will take care of you. He was bitten by a snake, he shook it off, and he felt no harm.

I've read that there are no more snakes on the island of Malta because, as in other relatively small islands, as more people populated them, the snakes were eradicated. This was aided by the introduction of predators like domesticated cats. However, at the time the apostle Paul was there, there were species, and some poisonous, as seen in this Biblical account.

What is curious about this story (in Acts 28: 1-10) is the response of the islanders. According to pagan superstition, Paul must have been guilty of some heinous sin, as everything seemed to be going wrong for him. First his trial and conviction and being sent to Rome, then the storm at sea which almost finished off the crew of the ship, and finally his being attacked by a viper. However, when they saw that the viper's poison had no effect, they radically changed their minds and said that he must be a god.

Well, neither was true. When bad things happen, it is not because we are being punished by God, even though at times we will reap what we sow; and likewise, positive outcomes and prosperity are not necessarily a sign of God's blessing and approval.

The 121st Psalm is one of the most assuring psalms in the Bible which tells us how God guards our life.

"I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? 2My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. 3He will not let your foot slip— he who watches over you will not slumber; 4indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. 5The Lord watches over you—the Lord is your shade at your right hand;

6the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. 7The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; 8the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.”

When we are in His will, when we are pursuing His plan for our lives; God guards and protects us.

Unhindered and Unstoppable! Nothing can stop you! Your life is guarded A second truth that emerges from this story. Nothing can stop you because.

II. We have a GIFTED Life.

Look at verse 7: “7Now in the neighboring parts of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us warmly for three days. 8And it happened that the father of Publius was lying in bed afflicted with a recurring fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him, and after he prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him. 9After this happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and being cured.”

It is obvious that Paul operates in the Gifts of the Spirit. God has empowered Paul with Spiritual Gifts. He has the gift of healing.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11` says,

1Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers, and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. 3Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

4There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. 5There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

7Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit,

10to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

Definition: A spiritual gift is a specific God-given ability for Christian service.

During his ministry Paul experienced many of the gifts of the spirit, like distinguishing between spirits, wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, miracles, healing.

There are certain blessings from God that are referred to as gifts and are given to all believers: salvation, eternal life, the Holy Spirit, justification, to name a few.

What is the difference between Spiritual Gifts and Natural Gifts?

- a. A natural gift is one that is present at birth though it needs to be developed into a talent or skill. A spiritual gift is one that is endowed by God at the new birth.
- b. Some natural and spiritual gifts may appear the same, such as the gift of teaching; but a believer may have the natural gift, without having the spiritual gift.

We know from I Corinthians 12:28-30, that Paul did have the gift of healing. We also know from that chapter that not everyone has the gift of healing. Paul didn't use the gift to put on a show. He didn't use the gift to draw attention to himself. He used it to heal human suffering and to help human need.

Sir Alec Jeffries is the British geneticist who discovered the DNA fingerprint decades ago. His accidental revelation made it possible to identify people by detecting variations in their genes, changing forensic science, criminal justice, and paternity cases around the world.

Let me read you something he said about your genetic fingerprint—who you are genetically. ***“You would have to look for one part in a million, million, million, million, million before you would find one pair with the same genetic fingerprint and with the world population of 6 billion, it can be categorically said that a genetic fingerprint is individually specific and that any pattern does not belong to anyone on the face of this planet who ever has been or ever will be.”***

That statement says there has never been and never will be anybody like you. You are unique and special. God has given you something that only you can do.

God has given you unique talents and gifts in order that you might be a blessing to other people and fulfill God's call on your life.

If Paul were speaking to you this morning, I'm sure he would say of any of his gifts, ***"it's nothing in me, everything I am and all that I have comes from God."***

That's true of all of us? Anything we have and anything we can do is because God has given us the ability or spiritual gift. In fact, Paul said one time, "What do you have that you did not receive?" The power always comes from God.

In the earlier years, I pictured Samson as a huge, muscular, body-builder guy. I've come to believe that's not true because he was always asked what the secret to his strength was. I don't think that Samson's strength was because of his tremendous physical size. I think Samson was just an ordinary looking guy because the bible says the source of his strength was the power of God that resided in him. When God took away the power, the Bible says, ***"Samson knew not that the Lord had departed."*** And he became as weak as an ordinary man.

It's not apparent in our English version, but in verse 8 you see the word, ***healed***. In verse 9 you see the word ***cured*** in the NIV, but in the KJV, the word ***healed*** is used in both instances. It's two different words for heal.

The first word is ***supernatural*** healing, whereas the second word is where we get our word, ***therapeutic***. That's where we get the word ***therapy***. What you have here is a beautiful partnership.

You have Paul using the supernatural gift of healing, and you have Dr. Luke ministering to the needs of the people in Malta. Physicians are taught. They get their gift of healing from their skill and training.

Whatever God has given you the ability to do; realize it's a gift from God and use it for His glory and as a believer be available for the Holy Spirit to empower you with Spiritual gifts.

I want to encourage young people in this building to commit whatever God has given to you back to Him and use it for His glory and for the good of other people.

STORY: I heard about a wife whose husband snored. She couldn't sleep because of it and she went to her doctor. The doctor said, "I tell you what you do. When he gets to sleep at night, just tie a ribbon around his nose."

That night he had a meeting, and he didn't get in until real late. He went to bed and immediately fell asleep and began snoring. It woke her up and she took a blue ribbon and tied it around his nose. Sure enough he quit snoring. The next morning when they woke up, she said, "Where were you last night?" He said, "I don't remember, but wherever it was, I won the first prize."

You may never win first prize. That's not the point.

The point is that your life is gifted. God will equip you for every good work He asks you to do. Your life is guarded. Nothing can stop you. Notice one last truth.

III. We have a GUIDED Life.

God not only guards you; He not only gifts you; God also guides you. I mean that when you are in the will of God, the Holy Spirit will order your steps.

In verse 11 and following you have the final lap of Paul's journey to Rome. He sails for a little while. In verse 13 he come to a place called Puteoli. And in verse 14 it says there were some Christian brethren and they asked him to stay for seven days. Then it says, "**and so we went toward Rome.**" It was about 140 miles by foot to Rome.

Along the way, in verse 15, some Christian brethren in Rome heard that he was coming so they go out to meet him. They met him first at the Forum of Appius. Then about ten miles in, another group comes, and they meet him at Three Taverns. Paul saw them and he thanked God, and he took courage. Then in verse 16 it says, "**and when we came to Rome.**"

That tells us that God is guiding his life. God is leading him in his destination. Paul had a great desire to go to Rome. God told him he was going to Rome to testify. In Acts 9:15 the Lord, when He saved him, showed him how great things he should suffer. Also, that he would witness before the Gentiles and before kings. He's going to witness before Caesar in Rome.

All along the way God gave him assurances. In the book of Romans 1st chapter, 10th verse, Paul says, "**If by any means now at length I might have a prosperous**

journey by the will of God to come to you.” It didn’t turn out like he thought. He was praying for a prosperous journey, but it ended up being a perilous journey. But he got there. I’ve often said that **God’s will is not a straight line.**

Do you know where you are headed? Do you know where God is leading you. If you get there, will you know you are there? Do you have a sense of destination in your life? God has a plan for your life. The greatest adventure of life is surrendering your will to God’s will.

Proverbs 16:9 (NIV) ***In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.***

Proverbs 20:24 (NIV) ***A person’s steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand their own way?***

Psalms 37:23 (NIV) ***The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him.***

That means God will guide your life, if you let Him.

Paul comes to Rome. He is not in there on vacation. Paul comes as a soul winner, not a sightseer. He’s there to preach the gospel.

In Romans 1, verse 1 he tells us, “I am a debtor, both to the Greeks and the barbarians, to the wise and to the unwise.” God had saved him, and it changed his life. Now he feels a sense of **obligation**. From the city of Rome, the gospel could go out to the entire known world.

Not only does he have an obligation, but also, he has a sense of **dedication**. Verse 15 says, “So as much as in me is, I’m ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.” His mind was **saturated** with the gospel. His heart was **stirred** by the gospel. His will was **surrendered** to the gospel.

He goes on to say in verse 16, ***“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.”***

You don’t have to be ashamed of the gospel. You don’t have to be ashamed of the Bible. You don’t have to be ashamed of the church. You don’t have to be ashamed of the Lord Jesus Christ. You don’t have to be intimidated by unbelievers, naysayers, and mockers. The gospel can stand the test. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah doesn’t need to be defended, just set him free.

Not only does Paul have an **obligation**, and **dedication**. Paul is guided in his **proclamation**. He is proud of the gospel.

The Bible says he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets from morning to evening. What happened is what always happens.

Look at verse 24. ***“Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe.*** It’s always that way. I wish everybody would be saved, but some choose not to believe.

CONCLUSION: Acts ends this way. ***“30Now Paul stayed two full years in his own rented lodging and welcomed all who came to him, 31preaching the kingdom of God and teaching things about the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.”***

Sometimes in movies, and in books...the story ends abruptly. It may be for effect; it may be because the author has said all they intended...and it may be because the story is to be continued. Jesus told parables that had open ended conclusions, because people had to decide to determine the outcome.

What does this mean for the church today? For You? What’s the BIG TAKE-AWAY?

It’s Possible for YOU to Persevere.

One of the take-aways from Acts is that the gospel of Jesus triumphs in the face of persecution, trials, troubles... natural disasters, etc. -- Nothing can stop the gospel, and if you are a bearer of the Good News, you are unstoppable as well.

Paul encountered.... Difficult People and Difficult Circumstances, Religious Troublemakers - Much like Jesus had to contend with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the scribes.... Paul contends with Jewish leaders who opposed the gospel.

Government Interference - Jesus was crucified by the Romans and it is they who are holding Paul in prison, and it is a Roman emperor who will later have Paul beheaded.

Storms and Shipwrecked - People aren't the only problem. This world is fallen, and bad things happens. - We go through storms and sometimes we crash.

You may be living faithfully for Jesus and... lose your job, be mistreated, get sick, lose a loved one, die. God is not caught off guard. He's working for His people and no storm, shipwreck, government, no person... can hinder God's work in your life.

Just like He stood by Paul He will stand by you! Paul could have given up. Cashed out. Recanted. But the gospel that progresses unhindered had changed Paul, and the power of Christ kept Paul.

Believers don't fall away... we persevere... because Christ Jesus ensures it. Even using the troubles of this life for our good.

This should stir you to live with humble confidence in the gospel. Boasting not in your...or your faith... but in Christ, His gospel...

Romans 8:31 (NIV) *“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”*

From Paul's life we learn we can and should PERSEVERE. Just so you know, Paul wasn't kept by His power, but Christ's. We persevere as we lean on Christ, rest in Him, we strive, we fight the fight, we wrestle...from a position of confident rest in Christ and His finished work.

The book ends and you are thinking... what happened to Paul? What about Caesar? Your left hanging. Why?

For one, this is just where the story was when Luke finished.

Secondly, this book is not about Paul or Peter, it's book about the work of God's Spirit in spreading the Gospel through the church. That story continues with us.

We are to proclaim the Kingdom of God; we are to teach about the Lord Jesus... and we should do it with all boldness... knowing that even if WE get hindered... the gospel will not be.

The ending of Acts invites you into the story, to participate in the continuance of the mission. The work is left unfinished...the whole world has not heard the good news yet. Jesus has not returned. So, until then we continue to take the gospel forward, and making disciples. -- And we do so knowing...THIS GOSPEL DOES NOT FAIL, and CANNOT BE STOPPED.

The question is not...does it work, or will people be saved and
disciplined...the question is always... WILL WE PARTICIPATE? WILL YOU?

**Let's be unstoppable people and get busy being an unstoppable
church, that boldly proclaims the UNHINDERED Good News.**