

Joke: A blind pilot walks into a plane waving his walking stick, the passengers all look at each other in disbelief. The flight attendant gets on the PA and says,

"Ladies and gentlemen, as you can see, the captain is legally blind, but rest assured, he is one of the best pilots in the world with over six thousand successful flights."

Next the co-pilot makes his way to the plane and he is also blind and uses his walking stick to make it to the cabin.

The flight attendant gets on the PA and says,

"Ladies and gentlemen, as you can see, the co-pilot is also blind, but rest assured, he is the second best pilot in the world with over five thousand successful flights."

At this point the plane begins to take off from the runway. As it gains speed, the passengers grow tenser. The plane keeps accelerating more and more and as it approaches the end of the runway, it still hasn't left the ground. The plane is approaching the end of the runway at high speed and the passengers scream, "we're all going to die!!"

Suddenly, the plane takes off and begins its ascent.

The pilot turns to the co-pilot and says, "The day they stop screaming, we're in trouble."

Unhindered Week 1 - Unhindered Kingdom

The book of Acts is the account of the birth of Church. It begins with the ascension of Christ and ends with the Apostle Paul writing letters while under Roman house arrest. It's the story of a handful of disciples who turn the world upside down with their message of love, forgiveness, and the salvation we can have through Christ. It's quite an epic tale, but it may be the final words of Acts that leaves us with the greatest clue for how to live as followers of Christ in the world today.

We are going to look at that during this series called "Unhindered." Unhindered may be the last idea of Acts, but it's how those who put their hope, faith, and trust in the risen King Jesus can live.

Who here has ever felt hindered or held back in some fashion in circumstance? You may have felt that you had more to give, more to offer, more to contribute. . .but something or someone held you back from doing it. What about in your faith? Have you ever felt like there was something more? Some piece that you may have been missing out on, when you read through the gospels and Acts and hear the stories of the miracles, the healings, transformations, and the boldness of the early church does it leave you wanting for more.

I hope so. There's always more God wants to do with you and through you, more revelation He desires to reveal to you. The entire reformation movement from the 16th century was rooted in this idea that something was missing in the experience of the people of God. They knew there was more.

What does being hindered mean to you?

When I think of being hindered, I imagine a thoroughbred racing horse, standing just behind the starting gate, waiting for it to open.

(Share the photo of a horse at a starting gate).

Once that gate opens up that horse is running free, and majestic. That racing horse is meant, is trained to run, but the gate hinders its movement and freedom. The gate is the obstacle, holding the horse back.

What is holding you back today? As a church, what's holding us back? What more does God have for us to experience in our faith?

As you think about those questions, as I mentioned a few minutes ago we are starting a series called Unhindered.

Using the book of Acts as our starting point, we're going to unpack several of the ways we are called and released to live "unhindered" lives of faith.

The book of Acts is between the gospels and the epistles, epistles are the letters written to the churches at the time, Corinthians were the books written to the church at Corinth for example.

In the Gospels, Jesus is preaching; in the epistles, Jesus is being preached. And in the book of Acts it reveals how the messenger became the center of the message. And Jesus must be the center. Amen.

The story wouldn't have been possible without God. He started it, motivated it, gave it direction, and purpose. And because He did that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Luke in Acts describes what God did with the church.

So as you go through the book of Acts it's important to remember that everything points to Christ and His church.

It's story after miraculous story of God's provision, power, and protection of His Church. It's Peter and John preaching to the Jewish Sanhedrin, it's all the believer's being of one heart and one mind, with a unity like no other, it's Saul's conversion to Paul, Peter's miraculous escape from prison, the list could go on and on.

The book of Acts is not a list of attributes to memorize or bullet points to fit into a spreadsheet. It tells the story of the birth of Christianity and the very beginnings of the spread of the Gospel.

And when you're going through the book of Acts there's one specific word that brings it all together, actually it's the very last word of the book.

Let's look at it. . .

Acts 28:30–31 (NASB) - "Paul stayed two full years in his own rented lodging and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching things about the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered."

Unhindered.

The NIV says without hinderance, others say none forbidding him or without any restriction. But the idea is the same.

By definition unhindered means, not restrained or held back.

What's going on in this passage?

Paul is sitting under house arrest. He rents his own space probably being supported by churches he helped establish. While he is there he's preaching the kingdom of God and teaching things about the Lord Jesus Christ with boldness, and confidence. And he did that unhindered, without restrain.

And I can imagine Luke, as he wrote Acts penning this final word on the parchment paper, trying to find the right word to end his account. And he writes okolytos which is the Greek word for unhindered.

And Paul wasn't just preaching and teaching those who came to him, he was writing letters from jail as well.

According to Christianity today. . .

"Most of Paul's writings were written over a span of 15 years. In AD 60, he arrived in Rome and was imprisoned later that year. For the next two years, Paul would live under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:30-31), but during this time, he continued to minister to those who visited and encouraged local churches via letters he wrote from prison. Paul's four "Prison Epistles," as they are called, were

written during this time. These four letters are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.”

It’s in these letters we see more of Paul’s unhindered message and constant encouragement to other believers.

In Ephesians Paul writes. . .

Ephesians 5:15–17 (NIV): Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.

Paul looks at adversity as an opportunity. And letting us know that you don’t need to be hindered by it. But use it to glorify God in the midst of it.

He even writes in a letter to the church at Thessaloniki. . .

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (NIV): Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

Then to the church in Philippi as he is in his house arrest he writes. . .

Philippians 3:7–9 (NIV): But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I

consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

It's in house arrest that he writes. . .

Philippians 1:21 (NIV): For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Those are the words of a man at peace. Paul is being guarded by a couple Roman soldiers and yet Paul is a free man because he knows whose he is, and who he is truly living for.

Encouraging those Colossians, he writes. . .

Colossians 1:21–22 (NIV): Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation

And by doing so he lets us know there is no obstruction or hindrance to the grace of God. Jesus died for everyone not just you.

And then in his last prison epistle Philemon, Paul writes a letter to on behalf of Onesimus. And says. . .

Receive Onesimus as a brother to be loved, not as a runaway slave to be punished.

And when you look at the variety of writing coming from Paul as he sits in house arrest. This is not a hindered man with an obstructed faith. He's not having a pity party blaming God for his current situation. And Luke, the author of Acts, describes 2 years of Paul's life in Rome with just 2 verses of scripture, Acts 28:30 and 31, and what better word to end the story than the word he chose?

Unhindered.

There are so many ways the unhindered freedom of faith impacts our experience as we follow Jesus. And over the next few weeks we'll talk about the way the kingdom that's today's message, we will look at unhindered forgiveness, power, and the gospel are how we are transformed and set free through the sacrifice of Jesus.

So, to begin today, let's look at the Kingdom of God.

Things changed when Jesus showed up. Just look at the gospel accounts of His life, and ministry. He was different from the Messiah that many were looking for.

He spoke in parables, He was humble, the son of a simple carpenter. And in spite of all these things, His kingdom and teachings turned and for those who allow Him in still turn the world upside down.

As modern day believers, under the new covenant of Christ, we are no longer hindered by the rules and regulations of the law. He is our high priest and because of Him we can experience salvation and redemption.

Simply put. . .

John 8:36 (NIV): So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

What specifically are you freed from? Here's a couple sin and death, or as Paul says it, the dominion of darkness. In the Kingdom of God we are no longer hindered by darkness, and no longer slaves to sin. And if we have a right relationship with God we really don't die we just change locations.

But unfortunately so many even in the body of Christ don't live in the freedom God promised.

Galatians 5:1 (TPT) - Let me be clear, the Anointed One has set us free—not partially, but completely and wonderfully free! We must always cherish this truth and stubbornly refuse to go back into the bondage of our past.

With that we are free to believe that God can and will act on behalf of His children.

We are free to come to Jesus with anything, free to approach the throne of grace with boldness and confidence.

We are free to live as beloved sons and daughters no matter the circumstances we find ourselves in.

Free to enjoy the lives that God has given us.

Free to count everything else as loss compared to the greatness of knowing Christ.

But the unfortunate truth is that many of us become disillusioned with our faith, we lose our awe and wonder and fear of the Lord.

We lose sight of our first love. . .and in so doing have put the chains of our former lives back on. . .

Galatians 4:8–9 (NIV): Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

Who wants to return to that enslaved life of sin? I know I don't.

But the reality is that we often become disillusioned, we get our feelings hurt when God doesn't answer our prayers the way that we want Him to, or think He should. And we can lose our awe and wonder of God. We can become hindered by our hurt and unmet expectations.

And so we are told...

Hebrews 12:1–2 (NIV): Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him

he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We are no longer buried under the rules of the law but liberated by the grace of God that is received through Jesus.

Ephesians chapter one may give us the most vivid picture of the unhindered kingdom when it describes the way that God lavished His love on us through Jesus.

Ephesians 1:3–10 (TPT): Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm has already been lavished upon us as a love gift from our wonderful heavenly Father, the Father of our Lord Jesus—all because he sees us wrapped into Christ. This is why we celebrate him with all our hearts! 4 And he chose us to be his very own, joining us to himself even before he laid the foundation of the universe! Because of his great love, he ordained us, so that we would be seen as holy in his eyes with an unstained innocence. 5–6 For it was always in his perfect plan to adopt us as his delightful children, through our union with Jesus, the Anointed One, so that his tremendous love that cascades over us would glorify his grace—for the same love he has for his Beloved One, Jesus, he has for us. And this unfolding plan brings him great pleasure! 7 Since we are now joined to Christ, we have been given the treasures of redemption by his blood—the total cancellation of our sins—all because of the cascading riches of his grace. 8 This superabundant grace is already powerfully working in us, releasing within us all forms of wisdom and practical understanding. 9 And through the revelation of the Anointed One, he unveiled his secret desires to us—the hidden mystery of his long-range plan, which he

was delighted to implement from the very beginning of time. 10 And because of God's unfailing purpose, this detailed plan will reign supreme through every period of time until the fulfillment of all the ages finally reaches its climax—when God makes all things new in all of heaven and earth through Jesus Christ.

To lavish something, as a verb, means, “to bestow in generous or extravagant quantities on.”

God held nothing back from us when He shared His Son. He send heavens best. He lavished His love through Jesus. He gave us extravagant gifts when He made a way for all of us to experience salvation and freedom from sin and death.

If that's not the unhindered actions of a generous Father then I don't know what is.

As I try to wrap this up, I wonder where you might be seeing the unhindered nature of faith at work in your life?

What areas would you add to the list I shared earlier of the unhindered kingdom, forgiveness, power, and the gospel...

I'm looking forward to the next few weeks as we continue in this series together.

But before we wrap up and before we move on, I want you to reiterate something I mentioned earlier. ..When I think of being hindered, I imagine a thoroughbred racing horse, standing just behind the starting gate, waiting for it to open.

(Show photo of a horse at a starting gate).

Once that gate opens up that horse is running free, and majestic. That racing horse is meant to run, but the gate hinders its movement and freedom. The gate is the obstacle, holding the horse back from what it is intended to be.

What's holding you back today? What obstacles are hindering your faith? Are you truly running free?

And hear this church I'm not saying running free to do what you want, to whomever you want, however you want. That's not freedom, that's going back to being in the bondage of sin.

It still wants holiness from His children, repentance when we mess up, and a heart that is like His heart. Loving what He loves.

Freedom is hearing God's voice, doing what He calls you to do.

The beauty of being set free, and the glory of being loved, is that we are always welcome to return, like the prodigal son we read about in the gospels, and cast off all the weights that hinder.

(use glass illustration)

- How heavy is this glass of water
- The absolute weight of the glass doesn't matter, it depends on how long I hold on to it.

- If I hold for a minute nothing happens, if I hold it for an hour my arm will begin to ache, if I hold it all day long my arm will fill numb and paralyzed

The weight of the glass hasn't changed, but the longer I hold onto it the heavier it becomes.

And hear this church, the stresses, the worries of life, the shame and regrets we tend to carry, the hurts and resentment that we hold onto are like this glass of water.

If you think about them for a little while it's not big problem, think about it a little bit longer it begins to hurt, think about them all day long and you'll feel paralyzed incapable of doing anything.

You need to remember to always put the glass down.

Or in our case, leave them at the foot of the cross, Jesus took those things upon himself so you don't have to carry them.

1 Peter 5:7 (TPT): Pour out all your worries and stress upon him and leave them there, for he always tenderly cares for you.

And so as I close today, I want to invite you into the unhindered kingdom, where God has lavished His love, grace, and mercy over us. Maybe for the 1st time, maybe for the thousandth time, or maybe just as a good reminder. . . never forget that if the Son has set you free then you are free indeed.

Next week we will look at unhindered forgiveness.