



Good morning I am Josh Burnham and I'm the lead pastor here at Bethel. I want to personally welcome all our guests here today! And I'll like to say hello to everyone watching online. I know many of you couldn't make it today or are simply checking us out and we can't wait to see you soon. There are 1 million things you could be doing right now, but the most important is that you decided to gather around the eternal unchanging name of Jesus Christ.

Doctors warn that a steady onslaught of loud noise is damaging the hearing of a generation wired for sound, although they may not realize it for years. More than **1 billion** young people are at risk of hearing loss because of personal audio devices, such as smartphones. They call this generation, *generation deaf*.

"Probably the largest cause [of hearing damage] is millennials using iPods and [smartphones]," says Dr. Sreekant Cherukuri, an ear, nose, and throat specialist.

"You (once) had a Walkman with two AA batteries and headphones that went over your ears," he told NBC News. "At high volume, the sound was **so distorted** and the battery life was poor. Nowadays, we have smart phones that are extremely complex computers with high-level fidelity."

I remember saving my money and spending \$150 on a cd Discman that you could run with. It was the size of a cd and it strapped over your hand. Our youth will never understand this 1st world problem.

Sound that is too loud or played too long can permanently damage your hearing. I believe the same to be true spiritually. We can pump so much institutional church/religion into our lives that it damages our hearing to the Word and to the Spirit.

Today's message is the conclusion of our series in the book of Acts entitled the Model Church, and the passage we will read is the final scripture in Acts of the Apostles. We will look at a people hindered to the ways of Christ in their lives a Deaf Generation. Here is my prayer: **Do you want to live an unhindered life?**

[An Unhindered Life Acts 28:23-31]

What hinders you from pursuing God's design for your life? Is it the absence of knowledge? Maybe. Today there are 7,096 unreached people groups in the world. Ethnic groups who do not

know the name of Jesus Christ. This is why we want to be a sending church. And we have missionaries in Guatemala now sharing the name of Jesus.

However, the greatest threat to faith and Yahweh's grace in your life is not the absence of information. **The greatest hindrance is not external. It's within you.** *Everyone place your hand over your heart.* This little muscle is representative of your greatest hindrance. This is not a unique 2019 phenomenon. In Paul's day, and even further in Isaiah's day, no sensory part of the person is responding. You will hear—never understanding, looking—not perceiving, callous hearts, hard ears, shut eyes. And yet, if they—if we turn, God will heal us!

Three symptoms of a spiritually hindered heart (28:27)

Dr. Luke uses a specific word (*epachynthē*) to describe a calloused heart. This specific word can mean dull, to fatten, to make gross, or unfeeling.

The Fat Heart is the first hindered condition that lurks inside each of us. The fattened heart is the person puffed up with knowledge. The fatty spiritual heart becomes greasy *not from lack but from abundance.* In Acts, Paul uses a quote from Isaiah 6:9-10. This immediately follows the grand vision and the "Here am I, send me" commission. The mission to the people of God, the Jews. The same mission of Paul: first to the Jews then to the Gentiles. *Moishe Rosen, founder of Jews for Jesus, said that the Jewish people are among the most gospel-resistant people in the world.* Today, the memories of horrors in the name of Christianity still haunt the memories of the Jewish people. This **does not imply total rejection, as a remnant will always remain.** This is the heart that says, "we have the law and prophets, we have the promises of Moses and the covenant of Abraham!"

But we are beyond that, aren't we? Oh how often we drink from the religious well of abundance. We have our wwd bracelets, Christian music, Bibles on every shelf and yet, oh how weary we are in worship, oh how difficult it is to pray. We are prone to the spiritual fatty heart that says, "What's in it for me" and "I need more." Me-first spirituality is a symptom of a hindered life.

The Gross Heart the word "calloused" can also mean gross. *No not the face you make when you eat Brussel sprouts.* *Grossness is unrefined, bitter, unpleasant, and very rude.* **This can be called the social media heart.** Something about social media tempts us to join in trollish behavior with the expectation that our voice needs to join the grossness. **The fatty heart says, "What's in it for me," but the gross heart proclaims, "I don't care about you."** It's the same condition that screams "If I can't have it no one can!"

It was gross callousness that led the priest and Levite to see the dying man and move to the other lane. Church, we can not afford to look at the broken with calloused hearts any longer! Paul knew what he was talking about because he received the opposite of grossness in Malta where the native people showed "unusual kindness." The calloused and bitter heart is the second symptom of the hindered life.

The Unfeeling Heart When the Word says that the hearts of the people have become dull it could mean unfeeling. It's another way to say you **have no warmth.** The roots of this condition can be found in hurt and pain. This is the person who has been through the fire. So to avoid future burns we shut down and build

fences. This heart simply wants to exist with no feeling. God did not send His one and only Son so that you could exist. Jesus died for your sins to let you live abundantly unhindered!

Do you find yourself relating to one of these? Thankfully Yahweh does not leave us in our diseased condition. He provides the prescription and remedy: a new heart (Ezek 36:26).

Acts 28:28 Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” The spiritually unhindered heart is the one with eyes to see, and ears that will listen. And the promise of Messiah is that some will listen. Paul was a man who lived unhindered.

This **one simple word** unhindered concludes Acts on an emphatic note as the **final** word in the final **sentence**. In the NT it is a **hapax** (only used once). Paul, an apostle living in chains lived freely. Paul continued to spread the word while being chained to a member of the Praetorian Guard, and he did so with greater boldness and without fear. Most striking is the use of the word in Josephus, where the right of Jews to perform their ancestral customs without hindrance or interference from Caesar

If anyone lived an abundant unhindered spirit filled life it was Paul! And Yet-- the word of God has triumphed—but not Paul. Paul was still in chains, still a prisoner. **Throughout Acts the triumph was never with the bearers of the gospel.**

This is God’s will for your life, that you live unhindered and triumphant because of the power of Christ working in your life. **The power of Jesus Christ is through you but not of you. We looked at 3 symptoms of the hindered heart, now lets look at 3 evidences of the unhindered-Christ filled heart**

Unhindered: Not fatty but hungry The fattened heart says I have had enough... religion, morality, church, Jesus. But Jesus tells us. **“blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled”** (Matt. 5:6). The unhindered heart is always hungry for righteousness and always filled. **Have you ever been so thirsty that you longed for your favorite drink? For me it’s a white PowerAde or Coke. And that first sip makes you say “ahhhh.” And then what? Do you put the drink down? No you want more.** The Unhindered heart is **always satisfied** with Jesus but **always wanting** more. It’s as if we say Jesus you are every thing I need and I cant get enough of you! Always hungry and yet always filled. This is the power of the Gospel! This is how Paul could proclaim and teach with all boldness and unhinderness to the end. Would you be bold enough to pray, Lord let my heart hunger and thirst for righteousness! **Let’s feast but never grow fat.**

Unhindered: Not gross but gentle and unusually kind The spiritually dead are calloused and gross. A callous is a thick layer of skin that develops when your body tries to protect itself against friction and pressure. A callous says for ever hurt, I add another fence or hurdle. You don’t have a callous big enough to protect you eternally. But did you catch what Scripture said about the people of Malta? **28:2 The local people showed us extraordinary kindness. They lit a fire and took us all in, since it was raining and cold.** **philanthrōpian.** The unhindered heart begins with a **change in perspective**. It says, **“Lord, how many times have you been kind to me when I was at my worst?”** The unhindered heart is unusually kind. What would the community of faith look like of others said, “Wow, these Christians are unusually kind. They have the right to be calloused and gross, but they responded with gentleness. **This type of philos +Anthropos is only found in a life unhindered by the glorious graces of Jesus Christ.**

Unhindered: Not calloused but convicted The unhindered life feels deeply, and it is convicted about the **right things**. Have you ever met someone who was emotional about everything? Eventually you become exhausted and unfeeling. I think often the world looks at the church and they see a bunch of angry emotional people. What would happen if we were convicted and emotional about the glories of Christ. Those doctrines and stances that are clear in Scripture, taking care of widows and orphans, standing up for right even at our expense, championing life, and convicted that Jesus is the hope of the world! **Oh, that we would be convicted not calloused. 31 proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. The End**

Conclusion (Head-Heart-Hands)

If acts were a Hollywood movie, we would all leave the theatre angry. It ends abruptly without resolution. Why? The conclusion of Acts challenges readers to consider how they themselves will continue the story of the gospel's progress (Peterson, 724). **Walter McMillian did not have a Hollywood ending.** [Invitation Transition]

Walter McMillian was falsely accused and convicted of killing 18-year-old Ronda Morrison at a dry cleaner in Monroeville, Alabama in 1986. Despite witnesses testifying that he was at a church fish fry at the time of the crime, McMillian was found guilty and held on death row for six years—all the while claiming his innocence.

An attorney named Bryan Stevenson decided to take on the case to defend McMillian believing in his innocence.

With Stevenson's representation, McMillian was exonerated in 1993. McMillian was eventually freed, but **not without scars of being on death row**. One of those scars was early-onset dementia. Stevenson comments, "Many of the doctors believed [the dementia] was trauma-induced; [it] was a function of his experience of being nearly killed.

So even after McMillian was free from death row, free from prison, and an exonerated man, in his **mind he was still a prisoner**. When Stevenson would visit him in the hospital, McMillian was still telling his lawyer, "**You've got to get me off death row.**"

I believe many of us still bear the scars of our sin, shame and guilt. Jesus Christ did not come to give you abundant live and let you remain on death row. What today keeps you from living unhindered for the same of the Gospel? Have you made Jesus Lord of your life? The cross paid the price for your release!

Are you still living as a prisoner? Paul was in chains yet unhindered. Some today are free but still in chains. By living in the power of Christ, the story of Yahweh continues through you.

Not Fat but hungry
Not Gross but gentle and unusually kind
Not Calloused but Convicted

Notes

Acts 28:25 Disagreeing among themselves, they began to leave after Paul made one statement: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah

This verse indicates that the positive and negative responses to Paul’s message in turn led to disagreements between the Jewish leaders who responded in varying fashions (BW3, 802).

Paul first of all affirms that what is said in the Scriptures represents the voice and mind of the Holy Spirit, not merely a human opinion (BW3, 802).

We must never forget Paul’s affirmation for his passion for mission: salvation was for the Jews first. Moishe Rosen, founder of Jews for Jesus, said that the Jewish people are among the most gospel-resistant people in the world. Today, the memories of horrors in the name of Christianity still haunt the memories of the Jewish people (NIV, 628).

26 when he said,

**Go to these people and say:
You will always be listening,
but never understanding;
and you will always be looking,
but never perceiving.**

27 **For the hearts of these people
have grown callous,
their ears are hard of hearing,
and they have shut their eyes;
otherwise they might see with their eyes
and hear with their ears,
understand with their heart
and turn,
and I would heal them.**

In this form of rhetoric, although God’s desire is that they might see, hear, understand, and turn, it is expressed negatively as a mocking challenge. The climatic statement is then unexpectedly in the future indicative. A change in the mood of the verb appears to highlight the hope of salvation, which is here expressed in terms of divine healing for those who understand with their hearts and understand (Peterson, 717).

What is important to note about the citation of this scripture here is that it did not signal a total rejection of the Jews in Isaiah’s day, nor does it do so in this context for Paul’s day (BW3, 802).

Both Luke and Paul shared a remnant view about Israel (BW3, 803).

No sensory part of the person is responding. Turning to God is the response that is lacking. Such turning would heal them but they refuse to do so (ECNT, 755).

The prophetic warning is that to refuse to hear the word is to risk reaching a point where it will never be heard (ECNT, 755).

Paul's gospel did not deafen or blind people to the truth: 'it is because the people have grown obtuse that they do not perceive in the message about Jesus the realization of their own most authentic hope' (Peterson, 717).

Acts 28:28 Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."

The verb here is in the past, not in the future tense, and so refers to an activity of God that has been announced since the beginning of Luke-Acts and has been underway at least since Acts 13. It does not refer to a course of action that will be begun for the first time only after the Roman Jews have rejected the gospel (BW3, 806).

What is contrasted is not the missions [to Jews or Gentiles] but the different audience's responses to the one mission.

Paul is seeking to make the Jews jealous and provoke them to find in Jesus the hope of Israel fulfilled (Peterson, 719).

Acts 28:30 Paul stayed two whole years in his own rented house. And he welcomed all who visited him, **31** proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

The book ends on a note of triumph.

The word *pas* (all) is a very important one for Luke, and it is no accident he ends Acts by using it. He wished to stress that the good news continued to be for everyone (BW3, 813).

Larkin suggests that preaching appeals largely to the will, calling for a decision, but teaching to the mind, urging growth in knowledge and understanding (BW3, 813).

Did Paul die in this house?

If Acts is biography, it would seem clearly to be an unfinished work. In regard to the genre question, the book's ending makes much better sense if Acts is some sort of historical work, meant to chronicle not the life and death of Paul but the rise and spread of the gospel and of the social and religious movement to which the gospel gave birth (BW3, 809).

It is Witherington's view that he was released from house arrest but was later taken captive again and executed during the reign of Nero, probably during the Neronian crackdown following the fire in A.D. 64.

Unhindered

This in all likelihood refers to the fact that there were no external restraints or hindrances placed on Paul in regard to his proclamation. Most striking is the use of the word in Josephus, where the right of Jews to perform their ancestral customs without hindrance or interference from Caesar (BW3, 814).

The term concludes the book on an emphatic note in closing the sentence. It is an NT hapax.

Luke's message is this: be reassured; the unhindered progress of God's word about salvation to all people is occurring by God's direction, fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the long-revealed promise of Scripture to Israel—and despite opposition (ECNT, 760).

Paul continued to spread the word while being chained to a member of the Praetorian Guard, and he did so with greater boldness and without fear.

We are to marvel at how God has protected Paul and accomplished his word (ECTN, 759).

The word of God has triumphed—but not Paul. Paul was still in chains, still a prisoner. Throughout Acts the triumph was never with the bearers of the gospel.

Illustrations

Mailman Hoards 2,500 Pounds of Mail

Everyone knows that a letter carrier has one job—deliver the mail. Apparently a Brooklyn mailman spent a decade avoiding his job by intentionally hoarding over 40,000 pieces of mail over a ten-year period. In September 2014, Joseph Brucato admitted hiding over a ton of mail (2,500 pounds to be exact) meant for customers in Flatbush since 2005, according to a Brooklyn federal court complaint.

A postal supervisor became suspicious that Brucato was up to something weird when he noticed his personal car was stuffed with undelivered letters. Investigators pressed Brucato about the letter cache, and he admitted hoarding priority, first-class, and regular mail that had once been headed for Brooklyn businesses and residents in Flatbush. It took five postal agents five hours to remove the massive stash of purloined letters from his apartment

Walter McMillian was convicted of killing 18-year-old Ronda Morrison at a dry cleaner in Monroeville, Alabama in 1986. Three witnesses testified against McMillian, while six witnesses, who were black, testified that he was at a church fish fry at the time of the crime. McMillian was found guilty and held on death row for six years—all the while claiming his innocence.

An attorney named Bryan Stevenson decided to take on the case to defend McMillian. Stevenson told a reporter:

It was a pretty clear situation where everyone just wanted to forget about this man, let him get executed so everybody could move on. [There was] a lot of passion, a lot of anger in the community about [Morrison's] death, and I think there was great resistance to someone coming in and fighting for the condemned person who had been accused and convicted.

But with Stevenson's representation, McMillian was exonerated in 1993. McMillian was eventually freed, but not without scars of being on death row. One of those scars was early-onset dementia. Stevenson comments, "Many of the doctors believed [the dementia] was trauma-induced; [it] was a function of his experience of being nearly killed—and he witnessed eight executions when he was on death row." So even after McMillian was free from death row, free from prison, and an exonerated man, in his mind he was still a prisoner. When Stevenson would visit him in the hospital, McMillian was still telling his lawyer, "You've got to get me off death row."

Application

If God showed favoritism you and I would never be his.