

8 ½ months ago, on the 7th February, we began our journey through the book of Acts. And today, that journey comes to an end.

In all honesty, I've actually found the book of Acts, a tough book to preach from. It's a mixture of church history and theology (and so it's very interesting), but I reckon what made it tough, was it's length. I found I was trying to pack so much in, so we could get our way through it all. And some of it – we've barely scratched the surface.

But I also feel, it's been **very challenging**, to us as a church (very challenging to me. And I hope it's been very challenging to you). As we see how the early church lived, and what they preached, and how the Holy Spirit was alive in that church, **surely**, it challenges us, to rediscover some of the passion and the power, and the commitment - of those disciples who would forsake everything, because of their belief, that Jesus lives.

In that first week (back in February), I gave 7 headings:

1. Jesus Lives
2. Holy Spirit
3. Religious Persecution
4. The great compulsion – that is the urge for Disciples of Jesus to **go** and tell others about Him.
5. Witness
6. Prayer
7. Church

And these topics didn't only come out in chapter 1 – they've been recurring, right throughout the whole book of Acts. And

even today, in the **final** paragraphs of Acts, we've encountered a number of these same themes again....

....

Now, since about Chapter 13, we've been following mainly the ministry of Paul. And it's been a story of how he would take the Gospel, first to God's chosen people – the Jews... And how most of the Jews would ultimately reject Jesus, And so Paul would then turn to preaching to the gentiles – the outsiders – those who were **not** God's people, and often he'd have a better response from them...

And today, Paul's journey comes to an end. He arrives in Rome (as a prisoner under guard), and he stays there for 2 years, incarcerated in Nero's prison... And although it's not recorded in the Bible, later church history tells us, that here in Rome, both Peter and Paul were executed, along with thousands of other Christians, as they were blamed for the fire of Rome....

And the book of Acts ends, with a similar theme, of what's been happening right throughout Paul's ministry...

God's people are told that, however much they hear and however much see,,,, they will never get it. They will **never** understand and they will **never** perceive what God is saying to them.... And this is God's judgment on them, because they themselves, have **made** their hearts impervious to the Word of God.

They have **allowed themselves** to become deaf. They have **allowed themselves** to become blind... Because they're

afraid that they **might** hear and they **might** see, the disturbing **reality** of the Gospel.ⁱ....

Let me give you a little audio/visual demonstration of the kind of blindness and deafness that he's talking about:

*(close eyes; fingers in ears; La La La; I can't see anything;
La La La; I can't hear anything)*

Things don't change much, do they?...

Jesus lives. He **was** crucified, but now He lives. And if we believe that Jesus is the Son of God – If we believe that He rose from the Dead - And if we believe in Jesus, and Trust in Him, and follow Him – If we repent of our sins, and stop living for ourselves, and begin living for Christ,... - we're on the road that leads to life...

That's the same Gospel message we preach today, that Paul preached almost 2000 years ago. And the majority of people who heard that message when Paul preached it, responded exactly the same way, most people do today.... They never hear it in a way that they understand it. Those who see it, never understand what they're seeing... Why? Because it's God's judgment, for not **wanting** to see.... It's God's judgment for not **wanting** to hear....

- I testify to you today, that Jesus lives. This is the truth.
- I testify to today, that in the name of Jesus, your sins can be forgiven.
- I testify to you today, that Jesus is returning to judge the living and the dead.

- And when He returns, those who are faithful to Him, will share in His glory.
- And, those who are **not** faithful to Him, will be condemned on that day.

And if this is true, (and I believe with every fibre of my being that it is), then that means that **how** we live today, has eternal ramifications.

We can either walk the hard, narrow road that leads to life, or we can travel down that wide, easy highway, that leads to destructionⁱⁱ.

And there – right there – lies the motivation, for deafness and blindness.

The gate is narrow, and the way is hard that leads to life. And if the gospel of Jesus Christ is true, it demands, that I enter that narrow gate. It demands, that I walk that hard road....

But it's so much easier to shut that out, and go "La La La La", isn't it?

I suspect I'm preaching, mostly to the converted here, aren't I? But you know what? We're not immune from this self-inflicted Spiritual deafness. We're not immune from this self-inflicted Spiritual blindness...

Even though we believe in God, how much do we shut Him out? How much, do we stop up our ears, so we don't hear God's Word? How much do we shield our eyes, so we are blinded to spiritual realities????

We know that our relationship with God is going to grow deeper, and more vibrant, if we pray, and not just once a day – if we live a life of prayer.... But what do we do? We fill our lives up with so much other stuff, that we don't have time for speaking with God, and we certainly don't have space to stop and listen.

We know that our knowledge of God, is going to grow, exponentially, if we study His word. We Know that He never fails to speak to us, personally, through His word, but the Bible lays, unopened, on the bookshelf, sometimes for days, maybe weeks, or has it been months... – Spiritual blindness. Spiritual deafness. We're not looking. We're not listening.

We know that when we make the effort, to meet together in home-groups – Bible study groups, we build one another up, and encourage one another on in the faith.... But it's not our priority...

In all of these ways, the Lord is speaking to us. He's revealing to us, the hard, uncomfortable truth, of where we're at, and where He wants us to be....

Are you hearing this? Are you seeing this?
Well, are you understanding it? Are you perceiving it?

What I'm saying, is in the Christian church today, there are many of us, who are very content, to live, in a state of spiritual deafness and a state of spiritual blindness..... We're very content, for our faith and our church experience, to be something which supplements our lives,,,,, as long as it doesn't disrupt our lives....

Some of the men in the church, are currently studying Experiencing God – knowing and doing the will of God. And in this week's study, Henry Blackaby says,

*“I have known some people who wouldn't interrupt a fishing trip or a football game for anything. In their minds, they **say** they want to serve God, but they eliminate from their lives, anything that would interfere with their plans. They are so self-centred, they do not recognise the times when God comes to them with a divine invitation.*

On the other hand, if you are God-centred, you will adjust your life to what God wants to do. God has a right to interrupt your life anytime He wants to! He is Lord. When you accepted Him as Lord, you gave Him the right to help Himself to your life.... ”ⁱⁱⁱ

Spiritual Deafness and Spiritual Blindness, is when we shut out God – so we can keep Him at a safe, arms-length distance.

“True belief in Christ – true faith – is a faith that demands your life, your soul, your all” ...

So, what do we do about all this?

Don't shut God out. Get into the Word. Pray. Seek God with your whole heart. Serve...

I can guarantee you, when we **truly** seek God, He's not hard to find. If your idea of Christianity is that it's something that supplements your life, but never disrupts it, then you don't know what Christianity is. A Christian is a disciple of Christ – someone who is devoted to Jesus – someone who follows The Lord, with all of their heart...

That's all He wants – just all of you.... But my, what a blessing it is, for our eyes to be opened, and our ears to hear, because the Lord is Good, The Lord is Kind. The Lord is Love; the Lord is faithful... The Lord is strength... The Lord is our hope... The Lord is our desire...

And that's why Paul kept on preaching, **proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ, with all boldness and without hindrance.**

And we can too.
Amen.

ⁱ Marshall IH. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries – Acts. Inter Varsity: Leicester. 1980. P424-425.

ⁱⁱ Matthew 7:13–14 (ESV) ¹³“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

ⁱⁱⁱ Henry Blackaby. Experiencing God – Knowing and Doing the will of God. Lifeway. 2007. P.47