

A Revolutionary Church

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[0 : 00] So, we're in a series asking the question, who are we called to be as a church in Washington, D.C.? What is God calling us to do in this city?

What does it mean to be a church in this day and age, in a city like D.C.? And so, to do this, we're looking at the book of Acts. The idea is that as we look at the story of the birth of the church, we gain a sense of what it means to be the church.

And at one point in the book of Acts, it's a little bit later, Christians are referred to as the people who are turning the world upside down. These are the people who are turning the world upside down. So, what we want to ask this morning is, what does it mean to be a community of people who turn the world upside down? What does that mean? All right, if you think about the neighborhood that you live in, most of you live in D.C. or some of you, Northern Virginia, or some of you, Southern Maryland.

So, think about your neighborhood, Petworth or Columbia Heights or Brooklyn or Langdon where we live or Chevrolet or Clarendon or Tacoma Park or any of the other neighborhoods that you represent.

[1 : 13] What would it mean to be the kind of person, the kind of community that turns that neighborhood upside down? Think about where you work. Think about your close circle of friends. Think about your extended family.

What would it mean to be the kind of community that turns the world upside down in that context? Another way of thinking about it is, what does it mean for us to be a revolutionary church in D.C.? Because that's really what it's talking about. Revolution. Right? Turning things upside down. And to answer this question, we're going to be looking at Acts chapter 3, 4, and 5.

And what this passage shows us is that the Christian movement, the Christian movement as a whole started a revolution. And that revolution continues through today.

And this passage shows us three aspects of that revolution. It shows us that the Jesus movement brings about social revolution. It brings about political revolution. And it brings about spiritual revolution, most importantly.

[2 : 13] So let's pray, and then we'll dive into God's Word. Lord, we thank You for Your Word, and we thank You that it has power. It has innate power. That we're not here just to listen to the reflections and the wisdom of human beings, but rather we're here because we believe that Your Word has power, and that because of Your Holy Spirit, Your Word is living and active.

That it does Your work in us. That it can bring us face to face with the living Word, Jesus Christ. And that's why we're here, and that's what we're hoping for. And we pray that in Your love and power and grace, You would make that possible, Lord.

In Your Son's name, amen. So first of all, the Jesus movement brings about social revolution. In chapter 3, there are two of Jesus' disciples, Peter and John.

They're going into the temple, and as they go into the temple, they have to pass through a gate. And when they pass through that gate, there's a man sitting there. This is very common for people who are poor or disabled to sit near the gate because there were a lot of people coming and going. And there's a man sitting there, and he can't walk, and he cries out for alms. He says, you know, you have a little money you can spare. And Peter and John turn to him, and instead of giving him money, they heal him.

[3 : 34] And this man leaps up and starts jumping around praising God. And this man, everybody knew this guy. He was there every day. So the fact that all of a sudden he's leaping around praising God immediately draws a crowd.

And also, you know, it's funny as you get older. I'm in my 40s now, and you catch things that you didn't catch before. It also says at one point, you know, everybody was marveling because this man was over 40.

You know, it's like it was an extra miracle, you know, to heal a guy in his 40s. And so everybody's praising God because this man who was in his 40s was able to be healed. And so Peter recognizes the moment, and he begins to preach the gospel, right?

He seizes the opportunity. And in Acts chapter 4 verse 1, it says the Sadducees come along with the priests and the captain of the temple guard, and they arrest Peter and John.

And the question then is raised, why would they arrest them, right? Is it illegal to talk about the things that they're talking about? What's the issue? It says in chapter 4 verse 2 that they were greatly annoyed that Peter and John were preaching the resurrection because the Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection.

[4 : 45] They didn't believe in afterlife. So that's part of it. But if you read the context, that's definitely not all of what's going on here. In order to understand why the Sadducees are so angry, you have to know something about who the Sadducees were in society.

The Sadducees were essentially the cultural elites. Sadducees of the day in Jewish society. They were the aristocracy. They tended to be, unlike the Pharisees, that was more of a populist movement.

The Sadducees were the elites. They were very well educated. They tended to be very wealthy, very powerful. They were very close to the Roman officials. They were in league with the Romans. And because of that, they had an enormous amount of clout. By contrast, in verse 13, the disciples are described as uneducated common men.

So what we need to see here is that this is all about social status. That's the issue here. The Sadducees are very high status people. Peter and John and many of the early Christians, low status people.

[5 : 57] So it's a class issue. But what we need to see is that this Jesus movement had begun to turn everything upside down. For the Sadducees, the very center of their power and influence was the temple.

The Pharisees were in the synagogues. The Sadducees controlled the temple. And that was the center. There's a whole reason they had the power that they had. But look at what's happening in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

There's a man being healed by the power of God. That's the kind of thing that's supposed to happen in the temple. Jesus' followers, there's several summaries of Jesus' followers selling their possessions and giving the proceeds to the poor.

And you say, well, why does Luke keep summarizing this? Well, it's kind of twisting the knife a little bit. It's making a point. That's the kind of thing, according to Deuteronomy chapters 14 and 15, that is supposed to be overseen by the temple.

Right? Selling your possessions, giving to the poor, that's supposed to be a temple activity. But Luke keeps telling us this is happening in the streets. It's happening in people's homes. Right?

[7 : 06] In Acts chapter 4, when they're being examined by the temple authorities, they quote Psalm 118. They say, the stone that the builders rejected, the stone that you rejected, Jesus, has become the cornerstone.

That's not just waxing eloquent there. Psalm 118 is full of hints that one day God is going to establish a new temple. Even this bizarre story, some of you know the bizarre story in chapter 5 of Ananias and Sapphira.

Everybody's selling their possessions and giving the money to the community, and Ananias and Sapphira lie about their possessions, and they lie to God, and they drop dead immediately on the ground.

And you say, well, why in the world would Luke include that story? There's all these amazing stories of healings and generosity, and then two people just drop dead, and you're like, why would Luke include that? Well, if you look back at Leviticus chapter 10 in the Old Testament, there's this bizarre story of two priests who disrespect God, and they die as a result, and this happens in the temple. And the point of the two stories is the same. When you are in a place where God's presence actually dwells, that is no small matter, and it can't be taken lightly.

[8 : 31] And Luke's decision to include that story is meant to point us back to Leviticus to make the same point that he's making again and again and again. God is building a new temple.

That's what this entire section is about. God is building a new temple, which means what? The old temple, the center of power for the Sadducees, obsolete.

It's obsolete. This theme runs all the... This is the reason that Stephen is stoned a little bit later, because he's saying, don't you get it? That old temple, that brick-and-mortar temple is obsolete. Anyway, it's built out of the team who's built. It's built out of people. It's built out of human beings. beings. It's built out of common, uneducated people like Peter and John, and it's built out of educated people. It's built out of slaves, and it's built out of masters. It's built out of men, and it's built out of women. It's built out of outcasts and insiders. It's built out of wealthy, and it's built out of poor. And what we see is this new temple, this new world order, is turning the entire social hierarchy on its head, right? This is revolutionary.

Just as Jesus predicted, those who had exalted themselves are being humbled. Those who had been humbled are now being exalted. God is turning everything upside down.

[10:06] So here's the first point we want to take from this as we ask Church of the Advent, Washington, D.C. What does it mean to be a revolutionary church in a place like D.C.? Here's the first point.

It means being a community that is a community of grace, not a meritocracy. Because we live in a meritocracy, right? And for some of us, there are things out there in your life that make you a somebody, right? You have things in your life that make you a somebody. You have really impressive credentials. You have a high-powered job. You have a massive generous salary. You have an impressive array of degrees. It's not hard to meet people like this in D.C. and in our church. There are a lot of very impressive people in our church. And what this tells us is, in the new temple, in God's new world order, those things might matter out there, but they don't matter in here. They don't matter at all in here. Likewise, whatever there is in your life that makes you a nobody out there, right? Your failures, your shortcomings, your detours, your plans that fell through, the job that you didn't get, the credential that you never got, right? The school that you never got admitted to. Those things might matter out there in the world, but they don't matter in here. They cease to matter in God's new world order. Out there, life is a meritocracy, right? People are grinding their kids into powder, driving them to the highest, most elite standards of success from like age one on, right? Making sure they get into the best schools, get the best grades, have the best array of extracurriculars, right? And people are trying to rig the game in order to make sure their kids succeed in the meritocracy, right? People work 80 hours a week, grinding themselves into powder for the meritocracy.

[12:20] None of that matters in the church. In the church, the only merit that matters is the righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to every single person in equal proportion. When churches forget this, you know, when churches start to give in to the meritocracy game that's happening all around us, when churches start to become like the culture in this way, you begin to see status creeping into the community. The people who give the most money have the most influence in the direction of the church.

You look at the elder board and you realize that it's made up of people with the most impressive credentials and the most impressive careers, right? The CEOs, the partners.

You see in the church community clear in groups and out groups, clear cliques, right? Newcomers have a very hard time being integrated because everybody kind of has their tight-knit friend group and there are groups that just don't talk to each other. That's what you see. But in a revolutionary church, we are very clear on the fact that when it comes to your status, there's only one thing that matters and that's your relationship with Jesus.

So in a revolutionary church, you might have a CEO of a major corporation being discipled by someone who's making minimum wage at McDonald's. You might have a person who has, you know, two PhDs learning how to read and study scripture from someone with a GED.

That's what a revolutionary church looks like. And that's the kind of thing that turns this world upside down. So the first thing we see in the Jesus movement is we see that it is a social revolution of which we are a continuing part. The second thing we see in this passage is that it's also a political revolution. In Acts chapter 4, the temple authorities come and they command Peter and John to stop teaching in the name of Jesus. They say, we can't deny the miracles, but we can force them to shut up.

[14:30] And Peter and John gives this amazing answer, whether it's right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge. For we cannot but speak of what we have seen

and heard.

And they continue to preach the gospel anyway. So in Acts chapter 5, the Sadducees arrest them again. And they throw them in prison. And the high priest says, we strictly charged you not to preach and teach in this name, and yet you keep doing it. You filled Jerusalem with all of your teaching.

And in verse 9, Peter and the apostles answered, we must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as leader and savior. That's verses 29 and 30 and 31. You killed Jesus by hanging him on a tree, but God has exalted him as leader and savior. And that word leader is very important.

The Greek word for leader there is archegos. Archegos, which means the chief leader, right? The king of kings, the highest authority, right? God has raised Jesus as the chief leader. He's the guy in charge.

Now that has massive political implications. In the Roman world, in Roman society, you could pretty much believe whatever you wanted. It was very pluralistic. You could have whatever religion, whatever deities you wanted to worship. You were free to do that as long as your ultimate allegiance was given to the emperor. And the way they talked about the emperor, the emperor was God on earth, God in the flesh. And the emperor was the Lord and the Savior of Rome. So as long as you knew who your true Lord and Savior was, as long as you accepted the emperor into your heart as your Lord and Savior, you could be a Christian.

[16 : 37] It just had to take second place in your allegiance. And the Christians, the early Christians said, absolutely not. We have a Lord and Savior, and his name is Jesus, and he's above you. Because God raised him, even though you put him to death, God raised him and made him the true king of this world, the Archegos. And so they said, you know, we have our true king. You can beat us, you can threaten us, you can throw us in prison, you can kill us. It doesn't matter. We obey him, not you. And that is incredibly significant. The second point about being a revolutionary church is this. A revolutionary church is one whose allegiance is clear. There's no doubt our allegiance is to Christ, not politics.

It's to Christ alone. What happens when churches forget this? Well, you go into a worship service, and you hear the same talking points in Sunday at worship that you would at the DNC, or at the RNC, depending on what zip code the church is in, right? You only see people from one side of the political aisle in the pews. And it is commonly understood that people on the other side of the political aisle are the enemy. They're the bad people. They're the people that we need to keep out, right? And this is even, this kind of political allegiance is even more true and more visible outside the church. You know, right now we're in a period of religious decline, which means more and more people, as you know, are disconnecting themselves from organized religion and reporting that they are unaffiliated. They're not a part of any organized religion. And in Christianity, we see this in particular. There's a major decline in people who are affiliating themselves with Christianity. Not surprisingly, and this is measurable, you can see this in the statistics, as religion declines, politics intensifies. As religion declines, ideologies become more and more extreme. Now, what does that tell us? It tells us that you can get rid of religion, but you cannot get rid of religious longing. Abraham Kuyper served as the prime minister of the Netherlands in the first part of the 20th century. And at that time, that area was becoming more and more secularized. And Kuyper argued that all strongly held ideologies, and if you look at our political landscape right now, it's filled with ideologies. All strongly held ideologies were effectively faith-based. And what he said was that no human being can survive long without some ultimate loyalty. So here's what we're seeing. Religious longings don't go away. You disaffiliate from, you say, I'm no longer a part of any organized religion. Those longings don't go away. They tend to migrate. Right? They migrate to something else. And so if you disaffiliate from religion, those longings will migrate to other secular commitments, such as nationalism or Marxism or liberalism. This is what Kuyper saw in his day. This is what we're seeing in our day. The intensification of politics as a result of the disaffiliation from religion. And so in the revolutionary church, we give our allegiance to Jesus Christ, not to politics. Which means the revolutionary church is always willing to speak truth, even if it's hard, unpopular truth, to both the right and the left. And this is what you see throughout history. Faithful Christians challenging totalitarian regimes on the right and on the left. In the revolutionary church, you see people from all across the political spectrum gathering together and worshiping together in the same church. Because they have a higher allegiance that unites them even if politics divides

them. In the revolutionary church, people know how to be politically engaged without becoming politically enthralled. In a revolutionary church, increasingly, especially in a city like Washington, D.C., it means proclaiming the whole Word of God even when it's not politically correct. It means conforming ourselves to the Word, not to whatever current codes of political correctness hold sway. This is the kind of church that turns the world upside down. This is the kind of church that brings upheaval. A holy, glorious upheaval. So this is where we are so far. We have social revolution. We have political revolution.

By far the most important that we see in the early church and in our current church is the onset of spiritual revolution. Social is important. Political is important. But the Jesus movement is, at its core, a spiritual revolution.

[21 : 56] The name of Jesus, if you read through these chapters, the name of Jesus is mentioned again and again and again and again. It's the drumbeat of these passages. In chapter 3, the name of Jesus has the power to transform a disabled man in his 40s sitting at the gate of the temple into a worshiper who enters into the temple. Right now, just think about that. There's a guy who can't go into the temple.

He's disabled. He's disabled. But he's made whole through the name of Jesus. And when the people come out and they say to Peter and John, how did you do this? They say, it wasn't us. It was the power of the name that did this. Right? And then the temple authorities repeatedly charge the apostles not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. That's what they're afraid of because they realize that when you mention the name of Jesus, crazy things start to happen.

When you mention the name of Jesus, new doors open, new possibilities become possible, even plausible, even likely, that didn't exist before. In chapter 4, verse 30, the believers pray for healing and they pray that signs and wonders would be performed through the name of Jesus. In their mind, the center of the movement was the power of the name of Jesus Christ.

And you say, well, what's the point of all this? Why does the name matter so much? In the ancient world, your name, your name was your entire identity. It represented your character, your worth, your authority. It was, all of you was bound up in your name. And in the ancient world, just like in the modern world, what did it mean to grant somebody the power of attorney?

If you know that concept, if you grant someone power of attorney, what that means is you were authorizing that person to act as your agent or your representative and to act with your authority.

[23 : 54] Right? If I were to give you power of attorney, it means you can act on my behalf, so you're effectively me in that situation, and you can act with all of my authority, whatever that might be. This is a very important concept. And what we see in the book of Acts is that in the early church, common, uneducated people like Peter and John are acting as Jesus' agents in the world.

They are speaking and preaching and teaching and healing with Jesus' power and authority, the exact same kinds of miracles that Jesus performed. Now we see them performing.

And what this means is, as they are preaching the gospel, healing the sick, caring for the poor, Jesus has given these people power of attorney. Speak my name, speak my name, and speak with my authority, and my ministry will be done through you. Right? And then moreover, in chapter 4, verse 12, when it says, and there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. You know, in the kind of modern West, we're all uncomfortable about that, and it's so exclusive and so intolerant. But we need to understand what this is saying here. All other religions say something else. Right? This is one of the things that separates Christianity and other religions. This verse right here. All other religions, philosophies, worldview, whether they be religious or secular, basically say the same thing. It all depends on your name.

It all depends on your name. This doesn't so much have lots of other religions in mind. I mean, that's certainly there. But equally as much as the sense that we need to decide whose name do we put our hope and trust in. Jesus' name or my name. You know, all other religions basically say, if your name is great enough, if you are morally excellent enough, if you are devoted enough, if you are disciplined enough, if your name is worthy enough, then you can attain enlightenment or go to paradise or hope to be reincarnated into a better form of existence. And it's even more true if you're a non-religious person. Right? If you don't believe that there is any transcendent world, if you're non-religious, then it's completely up to you to define your entire identity, to develop your own sense of meaning in life, and then to convince yourself of your own worth.

And that's a heavy load to bear. That's why the self-help movement is a multi-billion dollar industry. Right? But all of these approaches are based on the worth and the power of your name.

[26 : 49] You need to work all of your life, make your name as great as possible, accumulate as much worth for yourself as possible, and then maybe you will make the cut. But you won't know until you die. Right? Work all your life, and then maybe when you die, you'll make the cut. If not, well, it'll be too late. And if you live like this, like it's all up to you, like it all hinges on the greatness of your name, you're going to live your entire life feeling insecure.

You're never going to be really sure if you've done enough. You're going to look at other people who seem ahead of you in the race, and you're going to be threatened by their success. Am I worthy enough?

The gospel, the name of Jesus, is the only alternative to that. Because the gospel alone says that the only name worthy of salvation is Jesus' name. The only name that has enough merit is Jesus' name. Because you see Jesus in the gospels living a perfect life, a worthy life, the life that we should have lived. You know, if you look at Jesus as a role model, he'll make you feel horrible about yourself. Because he's unimaginably perfect. And that's the point. And salvation in Jesus' name means having a relationship with God that is based on what Jesus has done, not on anything that we've done. Right? It's on Jesus' worth, it's on Jesus' success, it's on Jesus' righteousness. And what that does is because Jesus lived that life, and it's done, and it's complete, and you receive it, it's once and for all. Like, you can't mess that up. It happened, it's in history, it's a perfect life, and now that credit has been given to you. And your sin has been given to him. And what that means is that you have total assurance. It doesn't rest in my name, it rests in Jesus' name. And you know, that assurance sets you free. If you're assured of that, then you can be honest about your failures. You can be honest about your shortcomings.

Right? And this is what we see in a revolutionary church. A revolutionary church is a church that is a community of grace, that trusts in the power of Jesus' name, not in our own names.

So in a revolutionary church, people are honest about their failures. They're honest about their shortcomings. When we confront one another, people don't immediately become defensive.

[29 : 23] Because I know that chances are there's some truth in what this person is saying. We can admit when we're wrong, we can admit that there are ways we need to grow. Because our worth isn't based in our name, it's based in Jesus' name.

And what we need to recognize is these disciples, these disciples are not first and foremost revolutionaries. A lot of people read Acts and they say, they started a revolution, we need to start a revolution. That's the wrong way to read the book of Acts.

What we see here, and the disciples are very clear on this, they're not doing any of this in the power of their own name. Jesus is the revolutionary. Jesus is the one turning things upside down.

And by following Jesus in the power of His name, His people have a revolutionary impact on society. That's a big difference. Now just to bring all this back as we close, our question at the beginning was this, what does it mean to be a revolutionary church that turns the world upside down?

Well, it means bringing social revolution. Your status might matter out there, but all that matters in here is your relationship with Jesus. It means bringing a political revolution.

[30 : 41] Our allegiance is to Jesus, not politics. So we will speak truth to power on the right and the left, and we will continue to do that. It also means bringing spiritual revolution.

Being people who aren't trying to glorify and build up our own names in the world, but people who trust in the power of Jesus' name. In other words, and hopefully it's become clear by now, a revolutionary church is a church full of people who are living right-side-up lives in an upside-down world.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word, and we thank you for your spirit, and we thank you for the name of Jesus. And we thank you for the power that is objective and real that is in our midst.

Lord, we thank you for being a God who turns an upside-down world right-side up. We thank you that the hope of the resurrection is a hope not only shared in Jesus or his followers, but that one day you're going to resurrect and restore this world.

Lord, you're going to turn it right-side up. And I pray that you would give us the faith and the power and the courage and the boldness to live right-side-up lives, even when things remain upside-down, because we know it will cost us, Lord.

[32 : 06] But that cost is nothing compared to the cost that you endured. And so give us courage, Lord, as we look at the cross. We pray all this in your Son's name. Amen.