

Peter's second sermon

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[0:00] Well, last week, we looked at the end of chapter 2, didn't we?

! Daniel reminded us of the characteristics of the church in those early days.

The apostles' teaching, fellowship together, the breaking of bread, prayer, sharing resources, signs of the apostles, praise, and the favour of the people.

It was all looking so easy. It was all going so well. What could possibly go wrong? And yes, as we look at that list, and then as we read on in Acts, and then into the epistles, and even in the opening chapters of Revelation, one has to say that each of those things is challenged in the life of the church.

I think you could go through that list and each one give an example of where that came under pressure in the history of the church, even in those early days, let alone in the 2,000 years since.

[1:38] We read of heresy, of dishonesty, of disunity, just plain apathy from inside the church, and we read of opposition and persecution from outside.

As the hymn says, with a scornful wonder, men see her sore oppressed, by schisms rent asunder and heresies distressed.

The enemy is not giving up without a fight. After all, this was only what Jesus warned them of.

He didn't say it was all going to be easy, all going to be sweetness and light. He said, in this life you will have trouble. And as the church takes up the Great Commission, there's going to be resistance. Attacks from within and without. But in spite of all these challenges, we read in Acts, the Great Commission is put into operation, and the good news is proclaimed.

[2:57] And particularly in Acts 3 to 6, we learn that opposition begins to grow, and internal problems arise within the church. In a sense, chapters 3 and 4 are transitional.

Luke recounts the way in which, with an apostolic sign, in Peter's second public sermon, the favour of the crowd, although it's still there, begins to turn dangerous.

An organised opposition to the gospel takes shape. The actual opposition we'll consider next week, that's in chapter 4. But this week we'll look at chapter 3.

This apostolic sign, in this very public place, and how Peter avoids the trap, as he preaches his sermon.

So the chapter starts, doesn't it, with a surprising act of grace. It was just another day at the office for this beggar. He was obviously good at his job, because he'd been allocated that prime site, the gate of the temple.

[4:18] I think if you were a beggar, that would be your first choice of site, to apply your trade. We read that somebody took place in there every day.

We're not told who it was, presumably not his relatives. Perhaps there was some sort of beggar's organisation that took people around and took a cut of the take, possibly, or maybe there was just some charitable people who took him there.

We're not sure. But he does appear to have got that prime site, the entrance to the temple. He does appear to have been genuinely lame, so it was not entirely fake.

But on the other hand, it may have been a bit of a racket. Whatever the truth, he was a familiar site at the temple gate.

He was there every day. Visitors, with their minds set on worship and prayer, would hopefully be in a charitable mood.

[5:26] They weren't rushing off to some business. They were meeting to meet with God, and they would have realised that an act of charity would be a good thing in those circumstances.

Doubtless Peter and John had seen him there before. He was there every day, and they'd taken the meeting together in the temple. So, presumably, they'd seen him several times before.

Perhaps that beggar had noticed their association with this new sect that seemed to have taken to meeting in the temple courts. Perhaps he'd heard that they seemed a fairly generous lot, and therefore they were maybe a good target for his plea.

He hoped perhaps they would be generous. But why he chose this particular day to accost Peter, or indeed why Peter chose this particular day to respond, is not clear.

Normally, if you're unwilling or unable to get involved, you don't make eye contact, do you? That's the sting of the parable of the Good Samaritan, isn't it?

[6:53] Those who were unwilling to get involved and passed by on the other side. And to be honest, I suspect that we've all done that on occasions, pretended not to see.

Maybe even Peter and John had ignored this beggar in the past, we don't know. But this time, they really see him. Verse 4. Peter looked straight at him, as did John.

They make eye contact. He'd caught the apostles' attention, and they in turn catch his. Why was it on this particular day?

Why was this particular beggar? There would have been hundreds or thousands of beggars in Jerusalem. We're not told. But somehow, Peter realised that God had business with this man, even if the man does not know it himself yet.

It's interesting, actually, that most healings in the New Testament are either at the request of the sick person themselves, or a close friend or relative. If you think of some of the healings of Jesus, usually, either the person themselves asked for Jesus' help, or a friend or relative did.

[8:17] But apparently not in this case. It's an entirely sovereign act of God's grace. Peter suddenly saw the man and thought, God has business with this man.

There's something we can do here. At first sight, the man doesn't even seem to have had faith, although it's interesting that in his commentary, Peter attributes the miracle to faith in verse 16. And of course, the man does have to respond to Peter's command to get up. You might wonder whether he was tempted not to. Go that way and, you know, his regular business, his regular spot was going to be over.

His life was going to change. Did he really want to make that change? Perhaps he had some doubts because we read that actually Peter had to put out his hand and pull him up.

Verse 7. But the man does respond. And so his life has changed forever. Grace, the grace of God has intervened in this man's life, even if he wasn't expecting it.

[9:35] So now he's no longer beholden to those who leave him at the temple gate. If it was a racket, they probably weren't too pleased, but anyway, people come and go.

Now he doesn't stay at the gate. Peter and John take him into the temple. Praising God. And of course, the point that Luke particularly makes here is that this change does not go unnoticed by the crowd.

How can it? He was a well-known figure there. He'd been there every day. They all expected him to be there. They recognised him. The man who'd lain many days at the gate of the temple and was now walking, jumping even, it says, and praising God.

So it seemed rather surprising. It wasn't, didn't it? But perhaps it shouldn't have been. Perhaps it was not so surprising.

Peter was never one to miss an opportunity and he preaches his second recorded sermon here.

[10:51] Probably not the second sermon he ever preached, but the second one we have recorded by Luke. Many of that crowd must have heard Jesus himself teach and yet we're told in verse 12 that they were surprised.

Perhaps some of them had seen one of Jesus' own signs. But Jesus was gone, wasn't he? Rejected by the Jewish leaders and the crowd had concurred in his death.

that story was done and dusted. Jesus was gone and would soon be forgotten like many teachers and leaders before him.

The crowd has moved on waiting for the next big thing. They notice his followers were still meeting, perhaps they will become of those many Jewish sects that were around at the time and there were do appear to have been several particular Jewish sects of one sort or another, followers of some particular rabbi.

[12:09] Nobody would have much of a problem with that as long as they left it at that. That would be fine. They might even be well thought of. And of course if they were going to do the odd miracle so much the better.

Nobody's going to be upset by that. What's not to like? They might well be popular if they can produce the occasional healing miracle.

But there was the trap. Whenever the church goes around just being nice to people and echoing the voices of the world they will not provoke opposition.

But Peter's having none of this. He pulls no punches as he addresses the onlickers. The guilt touches each one of that complacent crowd.

Look how he starts emphasizing you all the way through. If I were Phil I'd get you to put your hand up every time you read you but I won't do that. But just notice in verses 13 to 15 how often the word you occurs and I did check.

[13:33] It's the same in the Greek. The God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob the God of our fathers has glorified his servant Jesus.

You handed him over to be killed. You disowned him before Pilate though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the holy and righteous one and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. And later in his summing up it's the same in verses 22 and 23.

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people. You must listen to everything he says everything he tells you.

And then that curse anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people. Peter could hardly be more confrontational could he?

[14:44] I mean accusing your leaders of regicide maybe even deicide might not be a smart move politically. And yet this is what Peter does.

The only reason you're surprised he says is that you fail to understand. You fail to understand that this is not just another one of these Jewish sects.

Not just another failed rabbi. you saw this man healed but you don't understand its significance. You haven't understood that in fact the world has changed forever. You had a hand in rejecting Jesus.

Probably not each one of them individually of course but as a group you had a hand in rejecting Jesus. God had other ideas.

[15:50] You thought Jesus is gone done and dusted but no Jesus is not gone forever as you thought.

He's glorified in verse 13. This is just a temporary absence verse 22. He's coming back. The world has changed and there's a warning to fear that curse of Moses.

Moses. But then Peter lets them off the hook a bit.

There is still an opportunity for grace. For them at last at least it is not too late. the reason that Jesus has gone away is that it is not too late.

There is still a time to change your mind. Let me read you verse 16 to 20 again. By faith in the name of Jesus this man who you see and know was made strong.

[17:18] It is Jesus name and the faith that comes through him that has given this man given this complete healing to him as you can all see. Now brothers I know that you acted in ignorance as did your leaders but this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets saying that his Christ would suffer.

Repent then and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out that times of refreshing may come from the Lord and that he may send the Christ who has been appointed for you even Jesus they've been given a second chance before the wrath of the lamb is unleashed in those last few verses

Peter fills in a bit of detail it is because Jesus has been taken up to heaven verse 21 that there is still a time of grace that there is still time to repent God had sent the prophet that Moses had predicted and the people had not listened and yet by God's grace that curse has been deferred you probably know that

Peter later write in one of his letters the Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness he is patient with you not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance 2 Peter 3 verse 9 Peter is saying the same thing here it's not that Jesus has gone away that's done and dusted and forgotten he's gone away because it is a time of grace the gospel of Jesus is being preached there is still time to change your mind take a different route that's what repentance really means isn't it we think we do repent of our sins of course but ultimately repentance means to take a different direction to take a different view to become a disciple instead of what we were before of course here

Peter was talking to Jews these Jews were indeed the heirs of the prophets of the prophets and of the old mosaic covenant makes this point in verse 25 now it was the time to embrace the new as the prophets said predicted first of all Moses his prediction of a new prophet who would come after you and then the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah and Daniel always pointed forward to a coming Messiah one who would come and put in place a new covenant the gospel had to be offered first to this Israelite crowd as a right remember Jesus said it's not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs the gospel must first be preached in Jerusalem which is of course what Jesus exactly what Jesus commanded but Peter also reminds those listeners that in this covenant all peoples of the earth will be blessed as had been promised to Abraham finally as in all good sermons Peter makes it personal which is kind of a model sermon in many ways it starts with an introduction as the main argument and then a personal appeal at the end Peter makes it personal in verse 26 Jesus was sent to the Israelites first to bless them but Moses curse is only deferred it is not removed they have to take the cost on board each one of them individually must turn from their wicked ways it's what

[22:06] Moses said wasn't it he wasn't talking to the nation as a whole in a sense he says the one who doesn't listen to that prophet will be cut off from the people the curse is deferred but it's still in force they could not trust in being children of Abraham because that status was conditional it could be revoked of course there was nothing particularly evil about this crowd on the contrary they were actually gathering at the temple Peter says that you rejected Jesus probably they weren't in that mob that shouted crucify him or some of them may have been but certainly not all of them but they had rejected the long promised prophet that God had sent them as far as

Moses was concerned that was the ultimate wickedness that was the ultimate sin anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from his people Jesus himself had made the same point when challenged by the crowd hadn't he the crowd asked Jesus what must we do to do the works God requires Jesus answered the work of God is this to believe the one he has sent that is what God really wants not tithing mint and cumin but faith faith and belief and obedience for that crowd this was perhaps their last chance maybe not maybe they would hear the gospel later I mean Paul took several goes at

Paul didn't it before he was converted but it couldn't be their last chance a beggar that day had found grace even when he wasn't expecting it would they find that same grace well we don't know how they responded some did some didn't no doubt but what about us 2000 years later for us also the curse is still deferred for the Lord has not returned but it's still in force of course people get hung up over the exactly the status of the Jews in the new covenant in Romans chapter 9 to 11 Paul provides a commentary on these issues but people have different views it can be controversial I imagine if you took a survey of even us gathered here today we'd probably have different views but we should remember that

Paul there was writing to a group most of whom were not Jews just like most of us are not Jews and he makes a very crucial point does Moses curse apply only to Jews or to us as well Paul uses the olive tree there as a metaphor for God's people the metaphor being the Jews are the natural branches and us non Jews are wild olive branches grafted in so we shouldn't be complacent but take warning saying without going reading all of chapters 9 to 11 which is quite a lot and can be

quite difficult to understand there's one bit that's very clear let me just read Romans 11 19 to 22 you will say then branches were broken off so that

I could be grafted in granted but they were broken off because of unbelief and you stand by faith to not be arrogant but be afraid for if God did not spare the natural branches he will not spare you either consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God sternness to those who fell but kindness to you provided you continue in his kindness otherwise you also will be cut off Moses curse applies in the new covenant as well as the old if we turn aside if we don't believe the one whom God has sent we will be cut off from the people so that's the first point today are we believing the one who

[27:22] God has sent or are we in danger of being ourselves cut off we're Calvinists here and we believe in election but remember the elect to those who heed the warnings like that beggar who was called by grace but he did get up so individually we can ask that question but we can also look at this a bit corporately as well because we live today in a society that has largely rejected its Christian history our friends and neighbors have fallen into the same error of neglecting the prophet that God has sent!

And what is the result of that? Well we can see it all around us society fragments becomes chaotic! People are separated into tribes and sects! But pretty much what's happened in Jerusalem over the next 40 years after that event we were reading about today which eventually brought the judgment in this case judgment in the form of a Roman emperor who got fed up with their constant quarreling and violence and burned the city that's a warning to us as well it's a warning to us in the west and it's a warning to us in the church I think as well it's right and good to do acts of kindness of course that indeed is exactly the religion God approves as James tells us in James 1 27 it was the right thing to do what could be done for that beggar and if we don't intervene in a miraculous way we can still help those who are in need we can still plead the cause of the orphan and widow as James tells us to do we should still be concerned for those who are suffering here and of course in our global culture that we have today for those who are starving or victims!

of war all over the world but there's a trap here the trap is the one that Peter avoids he could have taken credit himself for this healing he could have basked in the adulation of the crowd but that would betray the task that Jesus has given him his ambition was not to heal the odd beggar how could he it was only one of him he could never do that much good his ambition was to call the people to repentance and faith and that of course would spread I don't think we can be forever haranguing people

[30:58] I don't think Peter and John and the other apostles did that Peter tells us in one of his letters to be subject to the authorities and so on not to be deliberately sort of revolutionary but at the same time we do need to preserve the purity of the gospel when an opportunity presents itself to present the to put the case as Peter did Peter took it and he didn't fluff his lines he was absolutely straight with them it's always a temptation with God's people to think it's their job to be nice to echo the values and preoccupations of the world when the church does that it's the touch of death anyone want to buy a church building read recently the church of

Scotland has put 300 up for sale so you might get one cheap or perhaps you don't fancy one of those how about a nice non conformist chapel plenty of those available too places places where once the gospel was preached in demonstration of the spirit's power but which abandoned their first love of course we'd all like to be popular nobody wants to be unpopular but this isn't what we signed up for when we became disciples those words of christopher idols hymn which we're going to sing at the end it is a world that crucifies faithful prophets of the lord so we're 2000 years on and the final outworking of moses curse is still deferred this is still a time of grace but it's still in force and we need to tell the world that some of us here are full time preachers of the word some of them are part timers like me others may not stand up in front of a crowd and speak at all and yet as

Peter says we're all witnesses as a church if not individually it's our duty to make sure the word is declared honestly and correctly not toned down watered down had an interesting conversation actually on Thursday when we were talking about leaders in the church and what happens when

people in the church disagree and I pointed out that in an independent church we have to work by consensus in a hierarchical church like the church of England or the church of Scotland in a sense for that matter the word can be imposed from above or equally heresy can be imposed from above but of course as an independent church we believe that authority rests in the assembly and therefore it means each one of us is responsible to ensure that the word is faithfully preached we always try to reach a consensus in our church meetings we do have votes but it's very rare actually when we have votes in our church meetings that there's a split vote it's nearly always an M-Con usually unanimous and if it isn't then we often don't implement the change at all we think and go back and wait till we really reach consensus each one of us has a responsibility to make sure that the word is preached faithfully and the gospel hasn't changed we have the same message now that Peter had 2000 years ago repent then and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out that times of refreshing may come from the Lord so as we close with sing that hymn preachers of the God of grace it's usually a hymn that's only sung at induction of ministers which I think is perhaps rather a pity I think put our heads together and I think the last time we probably sung it was when Daniel was inducted I did wonder whether to go through and change all the pronouns to change the they and them to me and us but thought maybe that was going a bit far but you could do it in your mind as we sing it's not a hymn of praise of course it's a prayer a prayer that the church will faithfully preach the word of God so even if you're not somebody who stands up in front of a crowd and preaches you are a witness and so you can in your mind change the pronouns if you like pronouns are very you've got to get the right pronouns nowadays haven't you it seems to be very important so you can change them in your mind to me and us if you like as we sing it so let's as we draw to a close sing that hymn preachers of the God of grace that faithful preacher that Peter was and that we should be also