

Jesus' passion and vision

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[0:00] Good morning everyone. So, most things in life actually become, or easily become humdrum after a while.

The excitement and anticipation in which we throw ourselves into a marriage, or into a new job, or a new business, or a new sporting venue, or something like that, can often be lost.

And it gets lost as we tend to focus on difficulties in that situation, or disappointments, or failures.

And those things are really take all of this, and cloud our whole understanding, the whole venture.

And we're left simply going through the motions. Or even worse, we're left in a position of looking for a new excitement in some new venture, or some new direction.

The same easy habit when it comes to the Gospel, when it comes to appreciating our own salvation, when it comes to thinking about the church, the community, the community, and the people.

[1:16] Perhaps individually, you'd say, well, I really value Jesus. I really value God's name. But over the years, my efforts to speak of the reality of a broken relationship with God, and the only solution being through the death and resurrection of Jesus, that has just brought a torn and abuse. It's just brought so much hostility to me, effectively, by the result.

And so, I continue to enjoy Jesus as a really private benefit. But I've got little interest in trying to share the good news with family and friends or a wider community. It's just too hard.

Or perhaps we might even think a little bit more deeply than that. We might think, well, actually, it's more than just a bit too hard. I've actually followed the conclusion and signed, perhaps I'm not even able to admit it, probably to my daughter questions, that the simple gospel message discussion hasn't been in our world. Especially given all the world has to offer these days.

And so, maybe what I really need to say is something I want to get more opinions of you. I want to get embarrassed about the gospels I know.

Friends, every so often, we just need to step back. And we need to refocus. We need to refocus on how amazing Jesus and the gospel is.

[2:48] We need to remind ourselves of how powerful the gospel is in our world, and how it actually literally changes people from the inside out. We need to step back and consider the responsibility of the world, and dare I say the privilege that the Lord Jesus has given us, by getting us involved in getting the message, the salvation message of the gospel out to the world, people who are so desperately need it. Step back and be clear about what we can expect when we do speak the gospel to those who are alive.

We need to be clear about what we can expect when we do speak the gospel. This is what I hope the series of Acts will be for you. Time to step back and refocus. Time to see again the beauty of Jesus and the power of the gospel.

Time to rekindle passion for the unstoppable Jesus. His unstoppable gospel and his unstoppable mission under his Lordship.

Let's jump into Acts chapter 1 now. I want to pose two questions. I see them on the outline. If you've got a bit of a minute, I can't wait to get on the door. Two questions.

What in the world is Jesus doing now? These two questions understand the answer. What else it comes in the Acts of the Apostles? What is Jesus doing now? Well, the answer is a very simple thing.

[4:22] Jesus is doing now the same as he's always been doing. Yes, he has a new base, but he has the same passion for saving his people.

About 2,000 years ago, Jesus came into this world, lived for about 33 years, was killed, was resurrected, and finally returned to his throne and glory in heaven, where he had been for eternity

and where he will continue to be for eternity.

So, given that 33-year time on this earth in eternity, then the question is, well, what is Jesus really interested in?

What is his focus? Well, verses 1 and 2. Luke, who writes both the gospel according to Luke and this volume here, the Acts of the Apostles, Luke sets out very clear.

And the two volumes that Luke writes are like two parts of the one continuous record of God's salvation plan. Part A, the gospel account details how Jesus began to establish his kingdom or rule through his work of atonement.

[5 : 41] In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach. And part B, therefore, Acts records what Jesus continues to do and teach.

That Jesus continued to build his kingdom from heaven. What was Jesus' focus on earth? Well, Luke 19, verse 10, and many other verses said, he came to seek and to save the lost.

That is, Jesus is saying, every aspect of my life, my death, my resurrection was about me doing that which was necessary to save my people, to begin the work of gathering the kingdom.

What is Christ's focus now that he's in heaven? Still, the saving of his people. What began as Jesus' ministry on earth continues just as passionately as Jesus' ministry from heaven.

Only this time, he's working through his new community of saved people, what we call the church.

[6 : 55] Now, consider the scope of his passion. Look at verses 6, 7, and 8. So when they'd come together, they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? Notice that word, Israel.

Verse 3, Jesus has been talking about the kingdom of God. And they fired back at Jesus, the kingdom of Israel. He said to them, it is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

The apostles showed very limited scope or very short horizon in responding to Jesus' teachings about the kingdom or rule of God.

Now, we don't really know, but the question is very obvious. Were they still thinking that Jesus would make Israel great again in political and social and economic and military terms?

[7 : 58] Was that the extent of their horizon, the extent of their scope? Were they thinking selfishly or perhaps even racially?

That is, really, we want God all for ourselves within this parameter we call Israel, within this parameter we call Jewish. And really, we are very happy with that.

We have got God, we have got the best wicked here, and everybody else can sort of go jump.

Whatever they were thinking, verse 8 makes plain, the enormous scope of Christ's passion.

He is talking about a spiritual empire that will cover the globe. That will not be bound by geographical or political or social boundaries.

It is a spiritual empire in the hearts and lives of a saved people. All sorts of people in every part of the world, says Jesus, will be changed from the inside out and brought under the rule of Jesus.

[9 : 00] And you guys are being given the privilege of being part of that gathering, in-gathering.

Jesus' passion is now to gather into his kingdom or bring under his rule those for whom he died while on this earth.

In a sense, the hard work has been done. Now he is just gathering in. But does Jesus have the power to deliver?

Well, look at verses 10 and 11. And ask yourself, what sort of Jesus are we dealing with here?

While they were gazing into heaven, as he went, behold...

Sorry, I need to go back to verse 9. And when he said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up. And a cloud took them out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven, as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?

[10 : 09] This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him going to heaven. Does Jesus have the power to deliver?

Well, look at the Jesus we are dealing with here. The Jesus who comes and goes in his world as he pleases.

Not even death could limit his power. And here he now returns to heaven at the moment of his choosing. And does so with the blessing and backing of God the Father and his full authority. And this is the Jesus we see in those earlier verses 4, 5 and 6. This is the Jesus who says he will send his Holy Spirit as a key weapon in the task of helping his people.

While he is not physically present. This is the Jesus who has limitless power. Both in respect to himself and in respect to operating in this world.

[11:17] So friends, we just need to stop, step back and say, Wow, what a stunning perspective.

Jesus is now busy, passionately busy, in the same task as he has always been busy in. Building his church as he rescues lost individuals one by one through the powerful message of the gospel of salvation. So, it's never the case, never the case, that somehow or other, Jesus is somehow or other busy with other things in heaven.

And doesn't really have time now to do anything concerned with earth. And so he's really just left his people on earth to muddle through the best they can. Left us to our own wisdom and power.

It's never like that. When a stone is dropped into water, concentric circles, ripples go out.

[12:33] But it doesn't matter how big the stone is or how big the water is, those ripples soon disappear. There's been so many causes have rippled around our world over the generations.

And most of them have disappeared. But 2,000 years after Jesus departed this world, his message of salvation is still causing ripples.

He's still confronting and, yes, renewing individuals. And today, somewhere around the world, in many, many places around the world, people will hear the message of Jesus, perhaps for the first time.

And will be broken down in tears. Tears of repentance. And will seize this message, this offer of Jesus for new life. And know an inner transformation.

So, why will that happen? Why will people all over the world today hear the gospel and be saved? Simply because that's Jesus' ongoing passion and work.

[13:50] Now, our problem is perspective, you see. We tend to look around and think, well, God's action to build his church or God's action in his church to bring it to maturity is so slow.

But perhaps we even think that the church of Jesus is actually losing ground and being squeezed out of our world in the face of growing hostility towards it.

But here's the problem, you see. We cannot see the whole world. And if we dig down into that, we actually do find that there's lots of action in so many places.

Day by day, hour by hour, I would venture to say even minute by minute around the world, people are being converted as they're confronted by this unstoppable Jesus.

And that raises my second question then. How do we fit with what Christ is doing?

[14:58] How do we fit with what Christ is doing? Well, it sort of parallels. Christ's people have the same base.

But under the renewing and empowering work of Jesus, we have a new passion, same base, but a new passion to see people saved. Now, at this point, we need to notice and remember that as Jesus returns to heaven, it is to the apostles that he hands the baton.

Verse 2. Verse 2. He's spoken until the day when he was taken up after he'd given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

So we've got to do a little bit of work here to move from the text 2,000 years ago to our own day.

The apostles had unique apostolic credentials and authority in the first phase of taking the message of salvation in Jesus to the ends of the earth.

They, from Acts chapter 1, would be the human face of Jesus' kingdom building through his Holy Spirit. Verse 2. They were specifically chosen by Jesus.

[16:20] Verse 3. They had to be eyewitnesses. Verse 4. They were under command or commissioned to be witnesses or ambassadors for Jesus. So that's very much something we need to wrestle with and take account of.

This was spoken to the apostles. However, while Acts is primarily about how Jesus uses the apostles to gather his saved people from the ends of the earth in their own day, it's also a pattern of how Jesus intends us to be part of that continuing work of gathering his people.

So there's a handover from apostolic authority to what I'm calling now post-apostolic authority. So what is our post-apostolic task?

We're not apostles, but we stand in line with the apostles in that sense of being the next generation of God's church, God's community of saved people. Well, what's our task?

Well, our focus is to reflect Christ's focus. Our commission or task from Jesus is, verse 8, I've already read it, to be witnesses.

[17:37] In other parts of the New Testament, the word is ambassadors. And what's our job as a witness or ambassador?

Well, we are to reflect Jesus. We are to be a conduit to Jesus. We are to speak the words of Jesus. We are to represent our master, Jesus. We are to model Jesus.

That's what a witness or ambassador does. For what end? As part of Jesus' grand plan of gathering his saved people from every nook and cranny of this earth that we live in.

Now, chances are we just see that as duty.

This is what I know I should be doing as a Christian. I think what it's intended to do here is give us a sense of privilege.

[18:40] Let me take you to Romans chapter 10, verses 14 and 15. You can read it in your own time. Romans chapter 10, verses 14 and 15. Paul actually quotes the prophet Isaiah. And he says this.

It's an extended quote. I'm just taking one sentence on it. He says, how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news. How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.

It's a picture from Isaiah. A picture of, you know, feeling lost and disconnected and just discombobulated, not knowing what's going on or what life is about.

And then suddenly into that picture, somebody comes to the front door with good news. And it's all sorted. How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.

Paul goes even further by saying that as, because this is a quotation from Isaiah that's reference, with reference to the Messiah.

[19:47] So what Paul's saying is that as we individual Christians speak about Jesus to those we have contact with, we are actually sharing in the ministry of Messiah.

When we speak of Jesus as Savior and Lord, when we speak winsomely of the changing power of the gospel in our own lives, and when we demonstrate that, we are actually in the same vein, as it were, as Messiah.

Whoa. And that's in light of all our failings and all our imperfections. So, my friend, let's be excited. Let's be excited. Jesus is unstoppable as he gathers his church to save people. And he has committed himself to using our witness, your witness in this process.

So, we should be excited about speaking the message of forgiveness, joy and light to those around us who are wandering, lost in darkness.

[21:10] But you say, but they're still cranky and angry at me. Yeah, they will be. Because, as Jesus says, people prefer darkness rather than light.

You don't speak to people who are neutral. You speak to people who are actually hardwired to reject the very thing they need to hear.

But that doesn't lessen the privilege of it. That doesn't lessen the reality that that person you've spoken to this week and last week and last year and last month and last year, 10 years ago, over a lifetime perhaps, you've just passionately been speaking to them, whether it's a neighbour or a family member.

Today might be the day when the Lord crashes through their unbelief and sweeps them into the kingdom. Now, verses 6 and 7.

Jesus said to them, look, you don't need to be anxious about the things which are not yours to control. I apply this to myself as well, even though I said you.

[22:19] I don't need to be anxious about the things that are not mine to control. We can leave to God what he alone can do. That is, only God can breathe life into spiritually dead people.

We can leave that to God and be excited about speaking the word of God to the word of the great King Jesus, knowing that that word itself applied by the work of the Holy Spirit is the very means by which the Lord will use it to bring life.

Knowing that there are thousands of ways to Jesus, but only one way to God. Focus our scope, then the next thing.

Our scope, what's our horizon? Our scope is identical to the apostles. We have the same gospel message to proclaim, though now it is written in the Bible. And our horizon should still be as large,

the ends of the earth.

Now that doesn't mean for a moment that we all have to go overseas as missionaries. But it does mean we're all missionaries. And it does mean that we should see every person in our family, every person in our workplace, every person in our street or neighborhood, every person in our city here in Newcastle, every person in Australia as Australians, and in every other country of the world.

[23 : 54] We should be seeing them as desperately in need of the life-giving message of Jesus. So my friends, let's stay on task.

When we speak God's word to everyone we intersect with, we are expressing God's vision, God's horizon. If you look at somebody in your workplace and think, no, they're just too hard, they'll be too angry at me.

Then your vision has shrunk. You don't have God's vision. To the ends of the earth. Every person, the lost, the sick, the broken, the wounded, the angry, the hostile.

Nobody is beyond the scope and power of Christ. And we should remember this.

And we should take comfort in this as we look at our family and friends and workmates. And we think they're just too hardened and rebellion. They're not going to hear the gospel.

[25 : 05] They're not going to be saved. They're beyond. They're beyond the reach of Jesus' renewal and Jesus' salvation. And we all get to think that, don't we? In fact, verse 10 and 11, again here, it's a little bit hard to know exactly what to make of this, but I'm going to pitch it in a particular direction.

If you don't agree with it, then that's fine. Talk to me afterwards. But verse 10 and 11, essentially these angels, these two men, I presume they're angels or some sort of spiritual embodiment anyway.

But they say to these guys, men of Galilee reminds them of just their ordinariness. Men of Galilee, why are you standing looking up into heaven? Essentially what's been said here is, hey listen guys, don't be skygazers.

Fixated on how lovely heaven will be. It's hard to know why they were staring into the sky, maybe they haven't seen Jesus going into heaven. Maybe they just thought, heaven will be so lovely. I just want to be home with Jesus.

That's certainly how I feel on many, many days of my life these days. Jesus says, don't be a skygazer.

[26 : 21] Don't be fixated on trying to escape the hardships of this life. Don't try and escape the commission I've just given you of being a witness for me in a hostile world.

Don't be fixated perhaps on personal comfort. Don't be one who cares too little about the spiritual needs of people around you.

Don't be, come content that you've been forgiven. That you've been renewed by Jesus. And simply being, enjoy that.

Enjoy being part of a church family like this. And seeing what we are now is almost like being parked in a private waiting room. Sort of separated from the awfulness of the world and the hostility of the world while we wait to go to be with God in heaven.

Because I think that's how we think of the church. And I don't think of the church like that, but that's what I find myself wishing for. I just want to be done with this life.

[27 : 29] And the hostility and the frustration. My own and that of others. And yet Jesus says to me, no. I've got you here. That means, you know, Paul says whether I live or die, it's all to the glory of God.

So I'm not parked in a waiting room just seeing out my days. I'm here as a witness. What's our power or weaponry?

And we see here that it's more than suited to the task. Verse 8. He says, I will send my Holy Spirit. Now the word there is *dunamis*, which is the word we get dynamite from.

So Jesus is saying, look, I'm asking you to do this task. I'm commissioning you to be my witness. But I never ask you to do something that I don't properly tool you for, equip you for. I'm telling you now, I'm going to send you the equivalent of high explosives.

That will be able to blast any degree of hostility. Clear out of its sinfulness into heaven. So friends, let's be supremely confident.

[28 : 47] Let me say that sentence I said a minute ago again. Let's be supremely confident. Jesus never asks us to do something without actually equipping us for the task.

Now maybe we don't recognise the value of the weapon we have at our disposal. That might be true. It may be that we prefer a different sort of weapon. Well, instead of a dynamite blast, we'd actually prefer to bribe people with nice things.

That might be true. But the reality is that we have a weaponry that's more than able, and we'll see more of this in the next couple of weeks, a weaponry that's more than able, more than up for the task that we're commissioned to.

And then ultimately another point there of confidence is that our confidence is not in our ability. It's not about us having to break down unbelief. It's not about us having to get inside people's hearts and change their attitudes and renew them from the inside out.

No, this is the work of the Holy Spirit. We just need to speak about Jesus. The Holy Spirit will do what only the Holy Spirit can do. Change hearts and minds and attitudes and renew from the inside out.

[30 : 04] So friends, I just close with a very simple challenge. Is there fire in your belly for Christ and the gospel?

Do you have the passion of Jesus to see people saved? Do you have the breadth of vision that Jesus has to the ends of the earth?

Is that your horizon? Not fixated on your own comfort? Not fixated on your own feelings as you've tried to engage with and received hostile responses from others?

But fixated on the unstoppable Jesus. And the beauty of relationship with him and with other believers in this church.

And you think to yourself, this is so good. I'm enjoying this so much that I couldn't possibly be quiet about it when others need it so much.

[31 : 14] Now if that's, if you don't have fire in your belly, then the question, the next question then is why not?

Is it because perhaps your Jesus is too small? He's not the love of your life. His word is not powerful.

His kingdom not worthwhile compared to that which the world offers. Or if you don't have the fire in your belly, is it perhaps then because your friends and workmates are too big in your thinking?

Too hard in unbelief. Too intellectual to hear about the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Too proud to have their image shattered and be broken and reduced to tears of repentance.

Friends, the best motivation to ministry and gossiping the gospel wherever you find yourself this week is to fill your heart with the beautiful, unstoppable Jesus.

[32 : 43] So as we move into Acts, my encouragement is just get stuck into Acts. Just luxuriate in it. And allow it to once again rekindle the fire in your belly for Christ.