

The Powerful Gospel

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[0 : 00] Men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst.

As you yourselves know, this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

God raised him up, loosened the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. But David says concerning him, I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.

Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced. My flesh also will dwell in hope, for you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption.

You have made known to me the paths of life. You will make me full of gladness with your presence. Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.

[1 : 19] Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on the throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brothers, what shall we do?

And Peter said to them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[2 : 45] For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself. And with many other words he bore witness, and continued to exhort them, saying, Save yourselves from this crooked generation.

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

And all came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common.

And they were selling their possessions and belongings, and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together, and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added their number day by day, those who were being saved. Amen. What do you expect to happen when you speak the gospel of Jesus to family or friends?

[4 : 13] Let me just leave that on the table for a second and tell you a story. Years ago, Alice and I were house parents at a girls' boarding school in Armadale. Years ago.

Years ago. And one day, a tiny, a really tiny year eight girl challenged me to a fight, which I thought was hilarious.

Years ago. Years ago. She put cushions on the floor in the middle of this public area. And there was a lot of people around, a lot of other girls around. She put cushions on the floor, apparently for me

to land on, which I thought was even more hilarious.

She then gave me the first option of grabbing her, which I resisted to start with, but eventually she insisted. So I reached out to pick her up.

The next thing I know, I was flat on my back, on the floor, gasping for air because I'd missed the cushions. Now, it all happened in a second, literally.

[5 : 19] And I still to this day don't exactly know how it happened, but it happened. Things didn't turn out as expected because she had a secret and powerful weapon at her disposal.

She was actually skilled in the art of judo, which would have been helpful for me to have known beforehand. But since then, I've learned that if you only bully people, you can't even assume to pick on small people these days.

So back to the question. What do you expect to happen when you speak the gospel of Jesus to your friends, family, workmates? Do you believe that the gospel of Jesus is powerful?

That's the title of my sermon this morning. But do you believe that? That it's powerful, that Jesus is unstoppable in his mission of saving those, all those he died for some nearly 2,000 years ago.

Do you believe that in 2021, Jesus continues to build his church, gathering one by one those people in time and space, those people he died for?

[6 : 28] From every tribe and nation in our world. Now, I think we might be tempted to think that in actual fact, when you look around the world, the cause of Christ is actually going backwards.

And that Jesus has actually been squeezed out of his own world. Of course, the problem there is that we cannot see the world at a glance. We don't know, really, essentially, what's happening in every part around the world.

But when we do inquire, and it's quite easy to inquire, when we do inquire, the evidence is actually beyond dispute. Daily, countless hundreds, thousands of people are being confronted and renewed by the gospel of Jesus around our world.

Daily, people are being added to the church. The local church. New local church families are forming. And that's often in spite of the most ruthless, violent attempts of governments and nations and authorities to crack down and rid themselves of the gospel of Jesus.

Friends, that's why we're doing this series on Acts of the Apostles called The Unstoppable Jesus. We want each of you to be excited, to be confident, to be expectant.

[8 : 05] That when we speak the gospel of Jesus, we are doing the work of Messiah. With the secret weapon of God's word applied by the Holy Spirit, bringing joy and light and life.

To people otherwise wandering and lost in darkness. That's what the series is about. So let's jump into the text this morning.

And just a little bit of recapping from the last two or three weeks. The radically fulfilled promises which dominate Luke's early chapters.

Which emphasize the unstoppable salvation work of Jesus. Even though he's now operating from heaven. The harvest has begun and is continuing and is unstoppable.

Because Jesus is unstoppable. In chapter 1, verses 1 to 11. The apostles were promised the secret weapon. Which would make them effective witnesses. Which would make them effective kingdom builders for Jesus.

[9 : 08] And that promise was the gift of the Holy Spirit. And his enabling power. And in chapter 2, verses 1 to 21. We saw last week.

That that promise is delivered in a mind-blowing moment. Together with, the verses there, that together with clear instruction by Peter. As to how do you understand what had just been experienced.

And witnessed by everyone. A large crowd. We're not left to guess how do you understand the coming of the Spirit. We're told in detail. And then Peter also helps us understand that the fulfillment of that immediate promise.

Needs to be understood itself in a bigger promise. The bigger promise of God's salvation. Made hundreds of years earlier through the prophet Joel. Where God said, I will act to re-establish my rule.

I will save my people by delivering them from their sin. And from the guilt of their sin. By dealing with their sin. I'll change them from the inside out. By my spirit. I'll give them proper understanding of me.

[10:14] Says the Lord. I'll enable them by my spirit. To live obediently in my service. And to my glory. God's promise has just been radically delivered.

And as Dave said last week. The Lord of the harvest has begun. His harvest. Now in the verses that are before me this morning.

I think that what Luke's doing is just given us two illustrations. Of radically changed situations. Radically changed people.

And a radically changed community. Illustrations of what happens when the Lord is busy in his harvest. What happens when we speak the gospel of Jesus.

What an incredible scene. We have here as we jump into verse 22 now. We got a group of about 120 believers. Including the apostles.

[11:20] No doubt. Absolutely stunned. As they spoke fluently in languages. Not known to them. Only minutes earlier.

We got a huge crowd. Well in excess of 3,000. We can just sense them milling around. In amazement. And at that moment.

We see the radically new face. Of Peter. No longer hiding in the shadows. Or denying association with Jesus.

Peter steps up. And confronts this large. And I'm going to suggest in a moment. Hostile crowd. It's a crowd of religious Jews. Both locals.

And those who traveled hundreds of kilometers. In commitment to the religious observances. Of special days and feasts. This particular one. That they have Pentecost. Now the crowd therefore.

[12:32] Each of them would have prided themselves. In being God's special people. They were so fanatical. In trying to protect the name of God. Protect Jewish religion.

That just remember six weeks early. 50 days earlier. They had banded together. To effect. The murder of Jesus.

Why? Because he had criticized. Because he had criticized. Their religious efforts. Saying that sacrifices.

And praying. And celebrating religious festivals. Would never please God. Or get them to heaven. No longer hiding.

No longer impetuous. Or no longer making grand statements. About himself. That we knew of Peter. From the gospel account of Jesus. Here. Peter. Very deliberately.

[13:29] Steps up. Calls for quiet. Urges people to listen carefully. To what he's about to say. And then what does he do? He talks to them about Jesus.

The very guy. That in their anger. They had set aside the law. To get rid of. Just six weeks earlier. They would have expected.

No doubt. To hear Peter say. More about what they had just experienced. But what do they get? They get an extended talk.

About Jesus. As I say. The very person they thought they were rid of. Even more confronting. Peter is telling these hostile. Religious people.

That they were wrong. Wrong about God. And the basis of acceptance with them. Wrong about Jesus. And the basis on which they murdered him. And in factly.

[14:31] Wrong in their religious beliefs generally. And. Actually at odds with God. And. And. My friends.

I would suggest to you this morning. Given what we know of Peter. From the gospel accounts. And what we see of Peter here. There is no question at all. That Peter has been empowered.

By the Holy Spirit. As he emphasis. Emphasizes. The thing he does. The things he does. He does in his talk. First of the one is that Jesus.

Can't be ignored. Now picking up in verses 22 through to. 25 there. Peter. Just gives a summary. Obviously on the one hand. Peter is saying Jesus was really human. He was a carpenter's son. From Nazareth. Yes his birth was surrounded with suspicion. And yes.

[15:29] Says Peter. He's really telling the crowd that yes. Jesus was so ordinary. That the Jews were convinced. He couldn't possibly be God's Messiah. God's Messiah would not be ordinary.

That was their conclusion. Jesus had to go. But equally obvious. Says Peter. That Jesus was God. Everything he didn't say.

Says Peter to this massive crowd. Demonstrated. Not only that he was from God. And had God's full support and approval. But that he was one with God.

Now, given the sort of straight talk that Peter delivers to this crowd, we would expect a massive response, wouldn't we?

[21 : 42] And we get a massive response from the crowd, but I don't think it's the one we'd normally expect. We might well expect the crowd to surge forward and in their anger and hatred and do to Peter what they did to Jesus just 50 days earlier.

Rip them apart. Get rid of him. Because he's saying all the things that Jesus said. And in fact, he's bringing to mind again that Jesus they thought they'd finally got themselves rid of.

So I think we would expect a large, massive response from the crowd. But the response we get here is not the one we expect.

It's a very surprising response. Because there is something sweeps through the crowd. But it's an overpowering conviction of sin and guilt before God. So last week, when the Spirit arrived, there was amazement, there was excitement, and there was some crude humor.

Oh, they're just drunk. And that was happening in response to the arrival of God's Spirit. But now, we can sense a quietness settling on this crowd.

[22 : 55] A soberness settling on this crowd. Self-reflection. Self-reflection. And indeed, the awful realization that they had got it so wrong in respect of God, in respect of Jesus, and in respect of their salvation.

Before, as religious Jews, they were convinced that their acceptance before God was based on their own goodness and religious actions. They were convinced that they'd done God a favor in killing Jesus.

But now, now they could see that instead of serving the Lord, they had arrogantly acted as if they were the Lord.

Now, there was this sickening realization that they stood alone and guilty before the Lord God of the universe.

Unable to plead ignorance. Unable to plead anything that would lessen their guilt. Unable to.

Unable to. And this sudden new realization breaks them and prompts nothing else but a urgent plea for help.

[24 : 15] Unable to plead anything that would lessen their guilt. How can we escape God's anger at our behavior? How can we escape?

In verse 38, Peter immediately tells them the way ahead. Repent. What is repentance?

Well, basically it's a total change of attitude and thinking, which results in totally different behavior.

These folk in this crowd needed to change their attitude to themselves, to Jesus, and to God.

They needed to listen to God's word and take it seriously, understanding that they rightly deserved God's judgment in spite of all their religious efforts.

[25 : 26] They needed to look to Jesus to deal with their sin and make them acceptable to God.

They needed to give up their autonomy and start living under the rule of King Jesus. And more than that, Peter says they need to demonstrate the reality of their opinions in baptism.

Baptism. Now, this would have been a really, really big thing for these religious Jews. Because baptism was only used when you were bringing Gentiles into the Jewish faith.

So baptism to these religious Jews would have been a humiliating admission of being wrong.

Would have been a humiliating admission of new association with Jesus, whom they had just killed as a criminal a few weeks earlier. This was a total turnaround for these people.

The amazing result of that repentance, the amazing result of true repentance for even murderous sinners, verse 38, complete forgiveness.

[26 : 50] In a moment, their situation was turned around. One minute, cowering under the wrath of God, realizing they could never pay the penalty their rebellion against God deserved, and their actions had reinforced.

The next minute, enjoying God's promise that guilt and judgment is totally wiped and replaced with full acceptance.

Family relationship with them, which is confirmed and guaranteed by God's Spirit taking up residence in them. Friends, I fear I've done a disservice to this beautiful passage, because it's a picture that we're meant to be sucked into and soaking.

What a turnaround for more than 3,000 people that day. Just think about it. Peter takes on a crowd whipped into frenzy by spectacular events.

And in response, he simply tells them the story of Jesus. Who he is and what he has done.

[28 : 17] And how God views him now. And that message alone, and it's a simple message, that message alone, by the power of God's Spirit, demolished, demolished lifetime unbelief for some 3,000 people.

Solemn converted, changing their attitudes and actions forever. What a moment. What an example or illustration of the Lord of the harvest, busy in the harvest.

But there's more. Verses 42 to 47. There's a radically changed community.

That's another illustration of the power of the Holy Spirit applied to the unstoppable salvation work of the Lord Jesus.

A radically changed community of all-in commitment emerges. Now I'm not going to dig into this at all. I'm just going to race through it very quickly.

[29 : 32] They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship. To the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul.

And many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. They were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need.

And day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes they received their food with glad and generous hearts praising God and having favor with all the people.

And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. a radically changed community of all-in commitment.

Totally committed to soaking themselves in God's word. Hearing learning being shaped being matured by that word.

[30 : 42] Totally committed to church worship fellowship prayer. You see they sensed they were part of a new community a new resurrection community a new community of Jesus and his saved people.

They wanted to be among a community of people who likewise delighted in Jesus and who owed everything to Jesus. Who honored and served Jesus.

They wanted to be around people like that and in community with them. they knew they needed each other in the daily struggle to be like Jesus and to witness for him.

And they were totally committed to demonstrated reality. They were totally committed to showing the changing power of the gospel to those around them.

And you can just see it there in those verses that they've been demonstrably moved from the attitude of me my mine possessiveness I've got my resources and they're mine.

[32 : 02] My time my energy my money my possessions demonstrably changed to lives characterized by other person centeredness.

What do you need? What do I have that I can use for your benefit? What blessing has the Lord given me that I can share with glad heart and praising the Lord with you?

Not a sense of loss but a sense of privilege. And this gospel shaped community was incredibly attractive to their wider community.

People were looking in on them trying to work out what was going on in this new community as it was formed. They loved what they could see. They may not initially have realized they needed Jesus who was at the heart of this community but they sure knew they wanted to see something and experience something of this new community.

They wanted to be part of a community where it wasn't possessive, it wasn't self-centered, where it was all in, where it was caring and loving and supportive.

[33 : 31] People want that in our dysfunctional, disconnected world. And as they come into that community, then we're told here that eventually they understood why the community was like that and what was at the basis of that community and ultimately they came to Jesus themselves.

the Lord added to their number day by day. People who were drawn into this community for whatever reason first drawn into it but ultimately the point is that they were swept into the kingdom, drawn into the community, swept into the kingdom as they found a fresh start in Jesus.

back to where I started. Friends, what a wonderful, what wonderful illustrations of what happens when we speak the gospel of Jesus.

Lives are renewed in an instant. so what will break down, what do you think will break down the lifetime unbelief and religious thinking of your family members, your workmates and people you intersect with on any given day?

Perhaps we feel uneasy about telling people they're sinful. No. we feel uneasy telling people that their goodness won't win acceptance with God.

[35 : 16] We might not feel it easier about telling them about God's wrath. Perhaps it sounds primitive, barbaric. Perhaps we just fear the response. But here's the point of Acts chapter 2 and if you don't hear anything else this morning, take this sentence away with you.

The message of Acts chapter 2 is that an ordinary person, remember Peter was really ordinary, an ordinary person speaking the extraordinary message about Jesus, can with the spirit's enabling reduce the religious fanatic or the loud mouthed cynic or the totally disinterested family member, friend or neighbor, and bring them to repentance and sweep them into the kingdom.

start, I said, what do you expect when you speak the gospel of Jesus?

My last word is, having looked at Acts chapter 2, what will you expect this week when you speak the gospel of Jesus?

Jesus. Let me pray. Lord, we thank you for your generosity to us in recording wonderful examples and illustrations like this, both which teach us of how you operate in your world, but also model it to us, Lord.

[36 : 55] Forgive us if we've given up having expectation people respond when we speak the gospel of Jesus. Forgive us, Lord, if we've actually formed the only expectation that people will reject it.

Lord, give us new hearts, new desires to gossip the gospel in our everyday affairs, trusting that you will do what only you will do by your spirit.

Break down rejection and unbelief and sweep our friends and family members and workmates into the kingdom. Lord, demonstrate your power to us, we pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen.