

Converting Muslims?

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity On the 11th of February 2001 The preacher is Chris Mitchell His sermon is entitled Converting Muslims, Christian Mark And is from Acts chapter 4 Verses 1 to 22 Well can we bow our heads and we're going to just briefly pray And then we're going to look at this passage Father we acknowledge your presence among us And your desire that we'd come to know more of your love for us And your desires for us And so we pray as we look at this passage of scripture That you would teach us More about how we can love other people For as your apostle said somewhere else If we do mighty things but do those things without love

Then we've done nothing So Lord we pray that you'd show us how to love In Jesus name, Amen A little while ago a CMS missionary Working in a predominantly Muslim country Wrote a letter to describe some of her feelings During the month of Ramadan She was living near a mosque And Ramadan is a month long period Of intense sort of spiritual discipline And fasting for Muslims And she wrote In the evenings from the mosque next door We have messages And readings from the Quran And a singing broadcast for at least two hours But yesterday went on until two o'clock in the morning It's a very wearing time And Christians need to be upheld in prayer It's also a time of spiritual oppression As Satan shows the power that he has Please continue to pray for us That we'll be faithful to our calling And that the darkness and opposition

Will be dispelled by the gospel Well CMS circulated a part of that letter And an angry clergyman wrote Back to CMS And he said I write to register my protest Your missionary's remarks about spiritual oppression Darkness And Satan showing his power Are deeply offensive to me And many others Not all of whom are faithful Muslims An angry response Now you can put a good spin on it And say he was upset Because you know The good intentions The applaudable tensions Of these Muslims As they seek to find God And seek to be Spiritual And seek to be close to God Are not being Upheld by this Missionary lady But I rather think I think that's putting good spin on it And it may be true to say That you know God would applaud Faithful Muslims

Who are genuinely trying to seek him But I think The more realistic spin to put on it Is that This clergyman And because I know Some of the clergymen That hang around Our diocese I think more That What he's saying Is pertaining A way of thinking That's not uncommon Outside the church But unfortunately Even More and more Is it prevalent Within the church This is the kind of way Of thinking That regards The Christian faith As just being one Legitimate faith Among many That You know For some perhaps The Christian faith May be a bit better In its teaching But Certainly it's not The only legitimate faith And basically There are many ways To God And the reason I bring this up Is because Tonight I want to speak About the whole issue Of going Somewhere Like Tadistan And converting Or seeking

To see Muslims One to Christ Jacob actually works Amongst A much More militant Bunch of Muslims Than Denny and I Will work amongst And in fact He's the expert here So after the sermon If you've got any questions Go ask him And he will answer Okay But when you raise The subject Of conversion Of Muslims A number of issues Come up Don't they It's a controversial Subject And I actually Only want to address Two issues And I think I'm being brave In just addressing These two Mind you The first issue That I want to address Is an objection Kind of which I've already Talked about But which runs Something like this Is it not true To say That God would accept The faithful And devout Muslim And if that is so Then why go And evangelise Him or her

[5 : 07] The logic flows Surely Surely it can't be true To say This is what Some people would say That there is no other Way to God Than through Jesus Christ Surely that's not true To say That's a kind of Theoretical issue And I think It's relevant For us to be thinking About even in our Own circumstances In Australia In a nutshell It's the question Is Christ the only way To God The second issue Is much more practical When we engage In trying to Win over And call people To follow

Christ If we go and try And evangelise Muslims To follow Christ Then almost inevitably Somewhere along the line We're going to encounter Hostility In fact As you may know Many would Vehemently Oppose any suggestion That a Muslim Should become a Christian Where Jacob lives If a Muslim converts He has to flee

For his life Because his family Will put a Sum of money up For the person Who would kill him That doesn't happen In Tatarstan yet But even so Many Tatars Become Christians At a huge cost They are often Denounced Or disowned By their family And many would Be seen As a traitor To their cultural Heritage And cultural Identity As Tata So what do we do When we face Hostility And opposition As we encourage People to consider Jesus How do we respond Those are the two issues A theoretical And a practical one That I want to Briefly look at By looking at This passage Tonight It of course Applies to all of us When we engage In evangelism Your Australian neighbour Will ask Surely I'm On my way to God I don't need to Believe in your Jesus I don't need to Come to your church

It will apply When your workmate Finds out you're a Christian And gets stuck Into you Because He hears you Talking about Your faith Which is important To you And he will Rubbish that And you will be Encountering Hostility So how do you Respond I actually find Acts 4 very helpful So I want us To look at that If you like To turn to it It's page 887 And I want to Unpack this Just a little bit In this chapter In Acts 4 We see the early Disciples For the Not for the first time But basically For the first Time in a big way Encountering Hostility And being forced To answer this question What gives them The authority To declare That reconciliation And a relationship With God Is to be found With Jesus alone This is the question That's put to them And this is how They respond So we're going to Read this

Passage Just verse 1 and 2 The priests And the captain Of the temple God And the Sadducees Come up to Peter And John While they were Speaking to the people And they were Greatly disturbed Because the apostles Were teaching the people And proclaiming in Jesus The resurrection Of the dead A bit of background What had happened Of course Was that the spirit Had come down On the group of disciples In Acts chapter 2 And people As a result of this Peter preached And a whole lot of people Had been baptized Baptized And the church Was enjoying The lively growth It grew in favour With all the people And then The church Used to meet In the temple And they'd pass This beggar And the beggar Had said to Peter And John Can you give me money And they said No we don't have money But what we have We'll give you In the name of Jesus Get up and walk And this guy Not only got up and walk He left and jumped And kind of caused Quite a stir And of course This had kind of Been the impromptu Situation for another Sermon to generate And so Peter's preaching And this is where We come into Chapter 4 Because This preaching That Peter was doing Was upsetting The authorities Their authority structures Because they were Teaching the people Not the priests Not a good thing But more than that They were actually Preaching in Jesus The resurrection Of the dead They were challenging The authority structures Of their day Just as we By going as missionaries Are probably going To be challenging The authority structures In Russia That's why we have To be very careful And ask you to be Very sensitive When you write to us Because we don't want To upset the authority Structures unduly But sometimes you will And this is what Is happening here Because you see Not all of the authorities Believed in the resurrection Of the dead And so they come And they grabbed Peter and John And they put them In prison Until the next day So what do we learn Okay

[10:12] From this The writer of Acts Actually gives his His own response To what has happened He immediately goes on In essence To say Despite the hostility That they've just Encountered And the opposition The Holy Spirit Just is continuing To work So verse 4 He says But many who Heard the message Believed And the number of men Sorry ladies In the church Grew to about 5,000 There's probably A good deal Over 10,000 People now And that was the Experience of the early church When you read through Acts You just get the sense That the Holy Spirit Is just about Unstoppable He's just Doing stuff And the people there Of the time Had kind of the choice Of getting onto this bandwagon Of what God was doing With his church And through the Holy Spirit Or just stepping aside And so missing Now I think we can have The same confidence today It's challenging To go to a place

Like Nigeria And Kaduna And be a Christian It's not quite as challenging Going to Russia And it's not quite as challenging Even being here in Australia And it's not Immediately true That the church Should immediately Keep growing No matter where we are But it is true To say that the Holy Spirit

Is pretty well unstoppable If God is working His purposes out We were just saying that Didn't we He will work His purposes out And if we are being faithful If we go to Kazan If you go to your friends God might not make them Christians overnight God may You know People may choose To reject God And they would never Accept him Right through their whole lives Until they face him And it's too late But God will Turn some people And draw them back to him He will keep working His purposes out So even though It's daunting sometimes To think about Going to our friends It's scary isn't it Hands up who finds it scary To think about Letting drop in your Come on I only saw one hand I don't believe you Okay Most of us Don't like Letting drop That we're Christians Most of us Find it fairly kind of Unsettling To have to talk about Such a personal thing As our faith in Jesus But God Honours it when we do And his spirit Can work When we do And And here it is The case The spirit Keeps on working And people believe The second thing We see Is that for the Original apostles And their understanding What they're doing There is no one There's just no one Quite like Jesus When the authorities Assemble the next day And they question Peter and John Challenging them Here now To say by what Authority They were doing And saying the things That they were doing And saying Peter again He's filled with The Holy Spirit As Jesus promised He would be When he was put Before the courts And challenged About his faith We might not have To stand in front Of courts But we will be Challenged about our faith Peter was filled With the Holy Spirit And he says in essence That it's in Jesus name It's by his authority That we do such things And say such things So verse 8 He says Rulers of the People and elders If we are being Questioned today Because of a good deed Done to someone Who is sick And who asked And asked how This man has been healed Let it be known To all of you And to all the people Of Israel That this man Is standing before you In good health By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth Whom you crucified Whom God raised From the dead This Jesus is the stone That was rejected By you the builders And it has become The cornerstone And there is salvation In no one else For there is no other name Given under heaven Among mortals By which we are We must be saved Peter stood by Jesus Uniqueness In the face of Hostility And opposition We see it Not only here But we see it In just about All of his other speeches That are recorded In Acts Many of whom I'm sure Many of which Are just summaries He For example In Acts 2 Is quite clear That Jesus is unique In who he is He says He says to the people Then hey This man This Jesus Attested to you By signs and wonders And I bet Through Peter's mind Was flashing the things Like he walked Across water Spooky He raised people From the dead That's even more Scary And mind blowing He stilled a storm

[15 : 18] He made blind men see Hey this Jesus Whom you put to death Wasn't stopped by you Because God Raised him again From the dead This man Is something else That's what they believed And I guess That's what we've got To come to terms with too Do we really believe that This man This Jesus Was unique And in fact In Acts 2 He says God has Gone on He goes on to say He's made him Lord And he is in charge Of the whole wide world He is the one Whom God promised Would come to reconcile The world back to him Because Jesus is unique In who he is And then also Peter always says Again He's unique in What he does In Acts 2 for example He goes on And at the conclusion Of what I'm sure Was a long sermon He says 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 That's a pretty unique thing That Jesus does He can Have your sins forgiven And he can give you God's own life Giving spirit His very self God has done Everything necessary He says For all people To be reconciled to him Through the obedient Life and death Of his son And so there is No other name By which we are To be saved See I wonder If we can push this Really I'm going to push This a bit more When we look At every religion We have to ask The question Hey Is this God invented Did God bring this To be Or is this Man or human Invented And then I think In Christianity We've got something To say Because Jesus Claimed to be God The originator The author of Christianity In many ways Was Jesus Who claimed to be God

So God Is kind of If you like The inventor And he claimed To be The way Back to God That God himself Had provided Jesus taught us That his death Was the ransom The payment For our sins And in fact That his cross Meant that it was Not our deeds That earned for us The way back to God It's not what we did That mattered But what he did For us It was for our sake That he was crucified So the question then comes Well is Jesus God's way back to himself Or are we as human beings Able to do what it takes To make our own way back There's God's way back Through Jesus Or

there's our way If we want to say That we can merit And earn our way Back into God Into relationship with God The Muslims are very clear That's how We We actually Do good deeds That might outweigh Our bad deeds That in fact We might merit Some sort of They They do have an understanding Of the mercy That God might have But the only reason That God might have mercy Is if you have Merited it in some way By your good deeds And so in fact You earn your way back And it's the same For the new age For secular materialism For Buddhism For animism For any other religion You care to name The thing that Distinguishes Christianity Is that A.

It claims to be Invented by God And B. It is a way back to God Provided by God himself And is not based On our own deeds Whereas all the other religions Are merit based So the question is Are we going to choose God's Invented way back to himself Or others Are we going to call others To God's way back to himself And I think In essence That's really where Peter and the apostles Came to There was just no one Like Jesus There was just No other name By which we must be saved Of course People find that Hard to accept And some people Will argue That that's not very good And it kind of Hurts their pride You see And their positions Because if it's Nothing we do That merits Our worthiness Before God That's kind of Very hurtful In the end To our pride It was interesting [20 : 04] When Peter and John Spoke this way The council Found it very hard To accept In fact They were dumbfounded And they were confounded In verse 13 It says how they respond They were dumbfounded Because they saw That these were just Ordinary men And they were confounded Because the truth Of what they were saying Was being evidenced Right there In front of them See the problem was The man That they all knew Had been a cripple From birth He was always At that temple gate He was now Healed and whole And he was jumping Up and down And saying Yeah Jesus is the name By which we're healed So they couldn't Say anything So verse 13 Now when they saw The boldness Of Peter and John And realised They were uneducated And ordinary men They were amazed And recognised Them as companions Of Jesus And when they saw The man Who had been cured Standing beside them

They had nothing To say in opposition So they don't receive The truth Which is what we find too When we go and talk To people about Jesus Not all will receive What we have to say In fact They asked Peter and John To wait a while For while they confer And what they said Is get leaked Because we find it here Written down And we know what they said Some things never change The council Have a leak And We discover That what they decide Is to order Peter and John Not to teach anymore In Jesus name And so they go And say this And when Peter and John Are confronted With this command They however And this is what We'll find We'll find that Certainly in In Jacob's context But even in our context In Russia We find that people Will say Don't speak To Muslims About Christ Don't do it

Peter and John And judge For yourselves Whether it's right In God's sight To obey you Rather than God For we cannot help Speaking about What we have seen And heard I love the gentleness With which they reply there Some evangelists Do draw hostility Just basically Because they are aggressive The best evangelists Don't The best evangelists Evidence what they say With love and gentleness And kindness So they say In a very respectful way Judge for yourself Whether what we are doing Is right In God's sight Or not But we just can't help But speak Of what we have Seen and heard In the face of hostility We've seen two things That the apostles did Well we've seen two things That the Bible

Will have us know Firstly That the Holy Spirit Will keep on working So don't give up Very easy to give up With talking about Jesus Don't give up God will use it Someday And secondly We can be confident I think And Jesus claims To be unique And so we can stand In all humility And say He is unique He is God's way Invented by God Back to himself God has basically said Look no way That you can invent Is good enough I've invented a way back Well you have to do nothing Hard as that might be To believe And now thirdly We see in the face Of hostility We can expect That the Holy Spirit Will empower us It will even compel us As we said As we hear See Peter and John Saying we cannot help it There's a compulsion Sometimes as we stand For him We cannot help But speaking About what we have Seen and heard People often ask Why it is that We're going to Tadistan And I found I can give all sorts Of rational answers I can say Look It's because of The imbalance That there is In the church Of resources Here in Doncaster Lots of ministers And Christians And people Who are going to Talk about the gospel In Russia It's not like that Maybe some of us Should go to Russia That's one reason That I've talked about There's a job there That

needs doing I ask myself Someone The Tata New Tata Christians Are saying We want Western people To come and teach us How to plant churches I'm no great expert But at least I've done it once So why not me Why shouldn't I go It's hard for me To leave my family But why not My wider family That is But more and more I find actually That there is An inward compulsion When I kind of Intellectually accepted

[25 : 07] That I should Really think seriously About going to Tadistan I said Lord One more thing I'm going to need To survive And to actually do What you're asking I said to God Would you give me A passion Or that's the word I used But a love For the Tata people Because I don't know them I don't have that love Would you give me That love And boy Did he answer that prayer It was a stupid prayer To make But the more I learn about Tatas And the more I get to To know Them And their culture The more God Stirs up in me A love for them And the Holy Spirit Does his inward job Of compulsion So I want to close By asking you To consider This question What will you do Will you be a part Of God's Mission to the world Will you Kind of Climb aboard The bandwagon Of what the Holy Spirit Wants to do In his world Or will you Step aside Will you be a friend

To non-believers For Jesus' sake Will you Venture To continue To find Kind of ways To drop Into your conversations Something about Your faith To those Who don't know Jesus as Lord And Saviour And will you Even be Thinking about Being involved In world missions You know Will you pray Would you give Especially you Younger people Would you think About going We'd love to have Some people join us In Tadistan Yeah And we'd support you Maybe not too much Financially But we'd support you With all the love That we could Muster There's plenty Of room For Christians In Tadistan I know That some of you Are already Doing these things And I want to Praise God For you I know God is

Rewarding you As you Honour him By standing Firm in his name And in what He has done But many of us I think all of us Need to keep Searching Ask God To keep Searching our hearts And say Lord is there A lack of love In us For those That you love The lost Those who are Outside your kingdom Will you give us The love Will you help us To yield More completely Into your hands And into the love That you have For other people So I asked Two questions I said Is Jesus The only way To back to God And I think The simple answer Is that he is The only way That God has made He is the way That God has asked us To tell other people About The question Will then become Will we respond

In all humility To what he has done And will we call Others to do the same The second question I said How do we handle Hostility and rejection When it comes our way And I think the simple answer Is with all humility Is with all humility And gentleness And faith We are called To hold firm To the conviction That God Will work his purposes out That he will continue To call people out And his spirit Will keep working in us As we strive To honour him And he will give us The love The power And the boldness That we need To remain faithful Witnesses to his name So I think we can Praise him in that He gives What we need Isn't he good Amen