

Study on Acts no.4

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[0 : 00] Let us turn now to the portion we read of God's Word, the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 5, focusing attention particularly on verse 31, him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

And then verse 41, and they departed from the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

Now last week we looked at the first section of this chapter where we have an account of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, the judgment that was brought to bear upon them, and the outcome of that very solemn event.

There was great blessing upon the church after the death of Ananias and Sapphira. And from that time the church entered upon a phase of a persecution which was ultimately to result in the death and the martyrdom of Stephen.

It is to the beginning of that persecution that this portion we have here tonight directs our attention. The church's early public witness we saw met with widespread acceptance in Jerusalem.

[2 : 11] The one group who continued to show a direct hostility and antagonism to the Christian church was the group called the Sadducees, who, as we saw earlier, were in the majority in the Jewish ecclesiastical council, which is called the Sanhedrin.

This religious party were in the majority in the Sanhedrin, and it was from the Sadducean party that the high priest was chosen.

And he, of course, sat as sort of chairman of that Sanhedrin. Now, we noticed some weeks ago why the Sadducees were opposed to the Christian church of the day.

Let us just refresh our memory in this connection. They considered the Christians as disturbers of the peace or of the public order.

And because the Christian people seemed to have so much popularity amongst the common people, they were afraid that this Christian movement was becoming rather nationalistic in its manifestations.

[3 : 37] And they were opposed to any form of nationalism. Because though there were Jews under the Roman yoke, they were working as it were hand in glove with the Roman authority, and they were afraid of any nationalistic movements.

Because they didn't want the Roman authorities disturbed in any way. So they adopted a policy of sort of trying to keep things in check, peace at any price, in other words, in case they lost their popularity themselves with the Roman authorities.

And for that reason, they were against the Christian religion. And particularly, they were opposed to the Christian faith because of its emphasis on one particular doctrine, namely the doctrine of the resurrection.

They didn't believe in the general, physical, literal resurrection of the body from the dead. And particularly, it was obnoxious to them to hear that this man, Jesus, was supposed to have been raised from the dead.

And all the reports that they had of the teaching of the Christian church was that of all the doctrines that they emphasized, this was at the very heart of their teaching.

[5 : 16] God raised Jesus from the dead. And God exalted this risen Jesus to his own right hand.

And so, for them, as someone put it, the preaching and the activity of the Christian church constituted a threat to the establishment of which they were custodians.

And you know that, we saw this in chapters 3 and 4, they had once tried to silence the apostles by imprisoning them and directing a warning against them, forbidding them to preach in the name of Jesus Christ.

And Peter answered then, as he was to answer this time as well, while he says, the question for us is this, do we obey you or do we obey God? And so their attempts to silence the apostles had failed. And in this chapter before us here tonight, in this passage we have before us, we have this account of another attempt to silence the Christian church.

[6 : 24] The apostles were arrested for preaching in spite of the prohibition directed against them in chapter 4. And here again, you have an account of the apostles' refusal to be intimidated by these people.

And the apostles' persistence in proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ as Saviour and as Lord. And as we come to look at this passage, I want later on to home in on the two verses that I quoted here just now, verses 31 and 41, to see the, to have a look yet again at the centre of the Christian message or the hub round which their message revolved.

Christ, we're told here, has been exalted by God to be a prince and a saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. I want to look particularly at this verse and then secondly, to look at the wonder of the disciples' joy when they were persecuted and when they were beaten, physically beaten and released by the Sanhedrin.

They counted, they rejoiced because they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus.

But before we home in on these two texts, let us just cast a very quick glance at the context here and at the account that we have of the apostles' arrest and imprisonment.

[7 : 53] In the first, from verses 17 to 20, when I counted their imprisonment and their miraculous, miraculous release, the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors that was in the temple and brought them forth and told them to go and stand in the temple and to speak to the people all the words of this life.

Now, this may have been, there's no reason to doubt that this was a divine, it certainly was a divine intervention on their part, they were released from prison.

And there's no reason to doubt that they were released from prison miraculously. How the angel appeared or what he did, we're not told. It's just that the angel came and opened the prison doors for them. Of course, there are some people, of course, scorn in this and who say, well, it wasn't an angel.

All right, even if it wasn't an angel. There's no reason why God couldn't employ someone. Some means, even in our own day, we hear stories of there being what they call inside jobs.

You see, people do this from inside or someone with a know-how from within who opened the prison door. Well, if you want to take that line, well, you take that line. The point is that God is in control and God uses whatever means he determines to fulfill his own purpose.

[9 : 09] But we will stick with what the Bible tells us here, that an angel came. This was the means that God used. The angel came and opened the prison door. Later on, we'll see that something similar to this happened again in the life of Peter.

So they were released and they went and they stood in the temple and they preached the word of God. And notice that, and this may interest some of you, notice that it was always, up until this time and up until the death and the martyrdom of Stephen, it was always within the precincts of the temple that the apostles were preaching.

You see, that was the place where hundreds of people passed by every day. And they used every opportunity, particularly in the vicinity of Solomon's Porch, to preach the word.

And Solomon's Porch became a name that was associated with these Christian people. And you know that there are places like that today. Even, I believe, in the school here in Stornoway, in the Nicholson, there's a particular area in the school there that is associated with the Christian boys and girls meeting together.

Well, you see, the disciples in the New Testament were exactly like that. They met in the vicinity of Solomon's Porch in the temple. And that's where they preached. And that's where the people gathered to hear them preach.

[10 : 32] And that was the message that was delivered to the Sanhedrin, that these people standing there saw they were rearrested and brought before them. And in verses 26 onwards, we have an account of the complaints of the Sanhedrin levelled against these men.

Seventy men comprised the Sanhedrin. Very learned, very intelligent, intellectual men. And at the head of them, the high priest. And so, they spoke to the apostles and they asked them why they

were disobedient to the prohibition that was levelled against them before. And they accused them of inciting the people against themselves. That was against the Sanhedrin. And look at what they said. You have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine. You intend to bring this man's blood upon us. You see, they were at the back, behind all their activity was fear. The fear that the blood of Jesus was that they were going to be made responsible for what was supposed to have happened to this man. And they said, you're filling Jerusalem with this teaching. And the growth of the movement of the Christian church was a social worry to these people who were, some of them were students of what we call rationalism, others were students of what we call ritualism. [11:51] people were taken up with the intellectual side of things and others were taken up with the religious side of things or with the appearance of things. And they were dead scared of this, of the growth of this Christian movement.

And you will find this, you will always find people who are afraid of the Christian church, afraid of its growth and afraid of its development.

You will always find this. And behind the antagonism of people is fear. There are many people storing away tonight. You go to their home and you find people who never darken the door of this church.

And behind their indifference and behind their antagonism, and many of them are antagonistic, behind their antagonism and their fear and their indifference rather, is fear.

You have no idea how afraid many people are that something will touch them, afraid that if they come to church other people will see them and afraid that their pals might see them, their workmates might see them, and they'll become the object of ridicule on Monday morning when they go to work.

[13:05] And they're afraid of that, you see. So they don't want to associate themselves with the Christian gospel in any way. And there are other people whose antagonism knows no bounds. And the thing that they don't want to hear about is any reference to progress on the part of the Christian church.

I mentioned this before in the course of preaching here, and I have no, I'm not afraid to say it again, that you will find the media, for example, that we speak of the Christian church and particularly in our area, the free church, getting a bad press.

And very often the fault for that is not the church at all, but the image that is given to the church by people who have no time for the church. And they delight in ridiculing the church and exposing the faults of the church, and no one would ever suggest that the church has no faults.

But you seldom have ever heard of any progress that is made by the church. You'll find people standing up and opposing the church or Christian people ramming religion down, for example, children's throats.

You'll always find that. But you'll never hear people standing up and extolling, at least seldomly you'll find it happening, people standing up and extolling the power of the gospel in and through the church and the lives of these same young people.

[14:38] You'll never hear that. People don't want to hear that. And there are opponents of the Christian church who would love to see it obliterated from the face of this earth, but they can't.

People always try to get rid of the church, and they'll always try to do it, but they failed before and they'll fail now. And the Sanhedrin brought the apostles before them and he said to them, Look, we commanded you not to teach in this man's name.

What are you doing? Why are you persisting in speaking in his name? And Peter replied again in verse 29, with this eternal principle that is always at the back of the church's witness, we are to obey God rather than men.

You know that in the times of persecution in Scotland, even in the, as late as the 18th century and the 19th century, part of the 19th century indeed, there were ministers in our land who were forbidden to preach the gospel in church buildings, in houses, in outhouses.

There was even the case of a minister who was refused to preach the gospel in the open air. And when the summons was placed in his hands, he said, when people command me, he said, deny me the access to a church building, I've got to accept.

[16:04] Deny me access to their home, I've got to accept. Deny me access to an outhouse to preach the gospel, I have to accept it. But when men, he says, when men, he said, deny me the privilege to preach the gospel under the open heavens, I will tear up that prohibition and I will

preach in the name of Jesus.

And that's what Peter said. We must obey God. God has told us, go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.

And he said, we have to obey that command. So confronted with that, the Sanhedrin deliberated.

And do you know what conclusion they came to?

They came to the conclusion that they would, in verse 33, they took counsel to slay them. They were considering the application of the death penalty to the disciples.

And that is where this interesting character, Gamaliel, comes in. He stood up and was he really who saved them. He stood up and he was a learned doctor of the law. As you know, later on in the book of Acts, you discover that this was the man who was the great teacher of the young man, Saul of Tarsus.

[17:24] He was a renowned professor of religion or of ecclesiastical history and of the application of the, perhaps you would call it today, practical theology.

And he had a very renowned student, Saul of Tarsus. Well, this man stood up and he counseled the Sadducees. Now he says, you be careful. You see, Gamaliel was a Pharisee.

And it's wonderful how God works. The Sanhedrin was made up of Sadducees and Pharisees.

Religious sects. The Sadducees were in the majority. And the Pharisee had no time for the Sadducees and vice versa.

And you know, when it came, and you'll see this right throughout the book of Acts, when it came to a confrontation between the Sanhedrin and the Christians, do you know what very often saved the Christians?

The fact that the Sanhedrin was made up of two religious bodies who couldn't see eye to eye. If it had been all Sadducees, they might have been successful in extinguishing the Christian church, humanly speaking.

[18:34] Similarly, they had been all Pharisees, but they were opposed to one another and Gamaliel was a Pharisee. Now the thing about the Pharisee was this. We'll see about them later on as well. They were what we call the separated ones.

They were very religious. Adopted a holier-than-thou attitude. That's what people say about members of the free church. That is the attitude. They adopted people. Well, no person would ever adopt that attitude to another because every single one of us is unworthy of the least blessing from his hand.

In any case, they were very religious. But another thing about them, they believed in the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees didn't. And Gamaliel wasn't going to see the Sadducees win the day.

And his argument became an ecclesiastical and a political one. There are people like that. They're called political animals. An ecclesiastical animals. You see, they always, he came forward with an argument sort of to keep the other party from getting its own way.

And that saved the Christians. And he gave them just one, this was really the summing up of it.

Look, he says, be careful what you're about to do. If this moment called the Christian moment is of God, you cannot stop it.

[19:44] If it's not of God, it will peter out. You remember, he says, what happened to Judas and you remember, he says, what happened to Judas of Galilee. Movements have sprang up and they petered out.

And you always get that. Movements spring up and there's a burst of enthusiasm and then they peter out. Well, this is what happened to these movements. And Gamaliel suggested to them, it may be, he said, that this movement will peter out like that as well.

Leave it. Leave it alone. And they accepted his counsel. And when they had chipped them, that is the meaning here in verse 40, they had beaten, called the apostles and beat them.

They commanded them that they should not speak in the name of Jesus. Let them go. And off they went and they rejoiced. And they carried on preaching and teaching in the temple and in every house.

Well, no, that is just a pussy of the events that led up to this account that we have here in this chapter. And I want now for a little to home in with you on these two verses.

[20:48] Peter's presentation of the Christian message yet again. God, he says, has exalted Christ, a prince and a saviour, to give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins.

And I want to look first of all with you at these words and consider the passion that he hears speaks about Jesus Christ, the prince and the saviour and the purpose for which he has been exalted to give repentance and remission of sins.

Now, as Peter speaks to them, he relates the gospel that his goddess give them to their traditional faith. The God, he says, of your fathers.

And the God of our fathers. This is the same God, he says, that we're speaking about, the God of history, the God of the Bible that you people know so well.

And he states the facts about this God and the facts about the message that he gave them to deliver. And at the centre of this message is this person, Jesus Christ.

[21 : 53] Always he confronts them with Jesus Christ. And he confronts them with Christ Christ of history as well. The Christ of God who was sent into this world by God.

Who was sent into this world for a purpose by God to suffer in obedience to the will of God and according to the purpose of God. And at the same time, he reminds them that this Christ was in the hands of men.

He says, you took this Christ and you slew him, you killed him, you hanged him on the tree. And there you have the two things, remember we've seen this, always going hand as they were in parallel lines.

God sending Christ in fulfilment to fulfil his purpose by dying on the cross and the other parallel line, men taking that Christ and putting him to death on the cross.

You notice how the apostles emphasised these two things, the sovereignty of God on the one hand and the responsibility of man on the other. True, God was in Christ as Paul puts it in Corinthians chapter 5.

[23 : 00] But, it was men who put him under the hand of God to death. And no man can therefore absolve himself from the responsibility that is his for doing what he does.

In the same way as you and I are here tonight as responsible beings under the controlling hand of God. And there's no way in which you can isolate and get rid of the teaching from the Bible that God is sovereign and that God determines the actions of all men.

There's no way you can't get rid of that unless you get rid of the Bible. And don't be afraid of the teaching. Don't be ashamed of it. Don't feel embarrassed if someone asks you, does the Bible say this? You just stand up and say, of course it says it.

So what? And you remind them that the Bible says something else. That you and I and everybody else we're all responsible for our own actions. God will hold us accountable for what we do.

And that's what Peter says to these men. You took this crisis. You hanged him on a tree. Why use the word tree? Well, what he's actually talking about is the cross, the piece of wood on which our Lord was hanged or crucified.

[24 : 13] And there you see he's speaking about the instrument of death. Jesus had to die in this way. Why? Well, for one reason the Old Testament predicted it.

And he had to die in accordance with what the Old Testament said. And then, because the Old Testament said, cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree. And Jesus came into this world under the curse of God because he was a sin bearer and therefore he was hanged on a tree.

You know, I mentioned here this morning that every single word in the Bible is of great significance. And when you come across a word like this tree, you stop and you ask yourself, now why should this be?

There's a reason for this. And there's a theological reason for it. Of course, some people don't like theological reasons. And the mention of the word theology tends to turn people off at once.

Well, my friend, the Bible is all about theology, the story of God and what God did and what God did for this world through Christ.

[25 : 22] And Christ was hanged on a tree because he was in this world as the sin bearer. And because he was a sin bearer, he had to suffer and he had to suffer unto death.

And there was no escaping death and there was no escaping the death on the cross. All, says Peter, predetermined by God himself.

It had to be like this God's remedy for the ruin and the sin of the world. The Son of God died on the cross of Calvary as a sin bearer for sinners.

the very heart of the Christian gospel. But notice something else that he says about him. This Christ has been raised by God and has been exalted by the right hand of God.

Here is God's place not just in the death of Christ but in the resurrection and in the ascension and in the exaltation of Christ. What is meant by exaltation is this that God in the course of time placed Jesus in his human nature as the Bible puts it on the right hand of God in heaven above or in glory. [26 : 43] He has been enthroned promoted crowned exalted glorified to the right hand of God.

And you know many of you have heard this already. One of the renowned preachers of the free church in the last century Rabbi Duncan used the terms the dust of the earth is on the throne of the universe.

What he meant by that was that Jesus in our nature governs the world tonight. And therefore he says God exalted him.

He died but he's alive exalted in what way? And this is the two words we have here before us tonight as a prince and as a saviour.

Now the word prince suggests to you various things. It suggests to us one who sits now in triumph receiving honour from men. If the prince of Wales should come to Stornoway tomorrow and step ashore down there at the quay he would be immediately honoured because of the position that he occupies.

[28 : 04] the prince awaits the heir to the throne. And this is the idea behind the word here that Jesus Christ is now enthroned receiving honour from men.

While he was in the world he said you hanged him on a tree. That was the honour you bestowed upon him then. You gave him dishonour, rejection. While he was in this world he was not received by his own people.

He was maligned. He was ridiculed. Scorn was poured upon him. All he ever received from men were the wounds in his hands and in his side.

But now Jesus is enthroned to receive reverence and honour and obedience and glory in heaven above. And he receives it from men in this world tonight.

There are men and women boys and girls in this church tonight. Who honour him as prince and as lord. Who honour him because he possesses power unlimited power that has saved them and helped them in many a situation.

[29 : 15] They honour him because he is the possessor of all dominion in heaven above. He exercises lordship from the throne of God on high.

And there are people who submit to his lordship who accept his leadership and who bowed before him as the commander of their soul. Prince!

Exalted as a prince at the right hand of God the Father. Also exalted as a saviour. And here we speak of Christ in his healing and saving power.

Jesus always spoken about with reference to the sin of man. He was the saviour while he was in the world. And he continues this act while he is in heaven, this function while he is in heaven.

He ascended the steps as you might put it like this. He ascended the steps that led to the throne of glory having finished the work that he came into the world to do and he came to complete his work as a saviour.

[30 : 22] And here you have now the power of this prince combined with the ability and the qualifications and the touch of this person as a saviour brought together exalted with power to save unto the uttermost.

And as that exalted prince and saviour he has a purpose in view and what is it? To give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins.

Now these are the gifts that Jesus bestows and this is the wonder of the gospel. This is the glory of the gospel and I know of no message in all the world that brings the two things I'm going to mention together.

They are these. The gospel commands you to repent and to believe. That's where it places you.

This is the demands it brings to the door of your heart tonight.

God commands you to repent and to believe. And I'm sure of this that those of you if you're listening at all those of you who know that that demand comes to you I'm positive that there are many of you who will immediately say but I can't repent and I can't believe.

[31 : 49] I've been taught that since I was so high and this has been a great emphasis of reformed teaching in this place since we can remember that we cannot do these things that God tells us to do.

I can't repent and I can't believe and that's exactly where the glory of the gospel comes in. I know that and that is indeed the way that the teaching ought to be emphasized.

You can't but this is the glory of the gospel. He can give you repentance and he can enable you to believe.

This is the emphasis and this is how he functions as a priest and a saviour. These are the gifts he bestows upon you. The gift of repentance he can make you repent.

So you see my friend those of you who boast in your knowledge of reformed doctrine and those of you who boast in the doctrine of the sovereignty of God and those of you who boast in the doctrine of the inability of man let me tell you something else that you ought to boast in.

[32 : 58] The power of God to meet your inability. Jesus tonight can give you repentance.

But then you see before we leave this what is repentance? What is it? Well I wonder if I can put it simply like this you see repentance is a change of mind a change of heart a complete change around in a person's thinking and in a person's acting.

It goes like this putting it simply the things repentance means that the things that used to please you now grieve you.

The things that used to attract you now disgust you. The things that you used to love you now hate.

The things that you desired most you now abhor. There's a beautiful story told in the Bible classic story of what repentance is the story of the prodigal son.

[34 : 20] That young man who was in the far off country you remember the story I don't need to rehearse it in the far off country and this was where his repentance came in he came to himself and he realized that his life was all wrong he realized that he was doing things that he should never have done he realized there was something wrong with himself as the American theologian the American great American Baptist preacher Al Martin put it he realized that his heart was all wrong and that he had a bad record and what did he do did he sit where he was and poured over it and mourned about it for the rest of his life did he sit where he was and as someone put it did he begin to write poetry about his circumstance about his feelings no what did he do he got up and he went back home to his father that's what he did and that's repentance that's what Jesus said a person leaves the position that he's in and he goes back he goes away from it he leaves it behind him that's repentance it is the heart broken for sin and the heart breaking away from sin it's not easy that's why the bible speaks of it as a tearing of yourself away a rending of yourself away a turning from sin to Christ repentance isn't just being sorry for your sin it's that but it's more than it repentance is being sorry enough to quit your sin to give it up to leave it behind you and I think that that's the best way that's the way in which the bible presents this doctrine of repentance to us and I said it before and I said it again

I'm not afraid to say it I know that there are some people who part company with me on this well so be it but as far as I can understand the bible's emphasis on repentance I would I would counsel you to beware against the kind of teaching and emphasis that would suggest to you that you can remain what you are as a sinner and take Christ with you into the life that you live I just don't believe that and I don't believe that the word of God sanctions that kind of emphasis one little bit if you follow through the bible the emphasis that you have and the illustrations that you have in the bible of men and women who were saved by the power of Christ operating in their lives you'll find this without any single exception every single one of them had to break with the life that they lived every single one of them and I believe that people who claim to be Christians and who continue to live the life that they've always lived

I believe that the portrayal of that kind of Christian life is doing far more damage to the cause of Christ than it has ever done it good repentance is a change in a person's life that makes him not only sorry for what he is and sorry for what he's done but that constrains him to give up that life and you say oh well you know maybe in some respects I wouldn't mind doing that but I can't I know that my friend won't you consider the glory of this prince and the savior he can give repentance to Israel and I don't know of any power in this world that will give it to you but the power of Jesus

Christ this is what Dr. Chalmers referred to as the expulsive power of a new affection in other words when Christ comes into the life the things that are contrary to the mind and to the will and to the desire and to the teaching of Christ these things have to go and if you're here tonight under a burden of sin this is part of your burden I wouldn't be surprised this is part of your burden that this life has turned against you these sins have turned against you the life you've lived has lost its power its appeal and you feel this weight and this burden now but what are you going to do with it where

are you going to go with it under this conviction of sin and this awareness of sin with this knowledge that you can't go on like this where are you going to go well remember another element of repentance inseparably connected with this faith you've got to come to Jesus Christ you break with sin and you come to him with your sin and you lay them before him and you ask for his forgiveness and that's what the power of Christ can do someone rather think was C.H.

[39 : 30] Spurge put it rather quently like this in his own inimitable way the cross can fetch the waters of repentance out of stony hearts oh hard heart be melted with this sacred fire the fire of Jesus love can dissolve the iron and the steel of objure impenitence and if your heart and mind were more filled with the love of Christ we would the more readily break with the sins that Christ doesn't want and that Christ doesn't want you to have in your life repentance being sorry for them and being so sorry that you have to quit them give them up and part with them well he can enable you he can give that spirit that grace forgiveness forgiveness what is forgiveness well it's only if we could go back to the story of the prodigal again and I'll leave it at this you remember he left the far off land he left that life and he came back home to whom to his father to his father and to what aspect of the father is particularly portrayed to us in that parable the forgiving love of the father he came to one who could receive him and I think that that's forgiveness it just it isn't just leaving your sin it isn't just the cancelling of the sin but it's the restoration of something else with the cancelling of sin it's the blotting out of all your transgressions and iniquities but it's also the giving to you of peace and favour and love and joy the giving of these things to the troubled soul so that the life is now taken up with something else the life of the forgiven sinner is taken up with the love of a forgiving God and this is the point taken up with the love of a forgiving God there are some people who think that to come to Jesus tonight would create a vacuum in their lives what's going to fill the emptiness of the things that I leave I'll tell you what will fill it the forgiving love of the Lord Jesus Christ that's what's going to fill the emptiness and the void and when a person's life is filled with that he's full of the joy of the salvation of God full of the joy of forgiveness and who does he give this to one word sums it up to Israel and who were Israel the people to whom Peter was speaking what had Israel done you took Jesus and you hanged him on a tree the people who had denied the Lord and rejected Christ that was Israel and that same Christ he said is now tonight able to give you repentance and forgiveness and this is the message of hope to you tonight in the gospel that this Christ whom you have rejected and despised for so long that same Christ is able to give you repentance and forgiveness there is no limiting of his power and you see my friend you have no excuse tonight I know that you're unable but he's not I also know that you need this and he can give it and this is the glory of the grace of God in the gospel and one word in conclusion the wonder of these people's joy when they were released by the Sanhedrin they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name and I can't but help thinking as I read the book of Acts how often these men rejoiced in the face of circumstances that would seem to suggest to them that they had no reason to rejoice at all you think of these men as we follow the story and succeeding weeks here you'll find these men became outcasts from society they were put to death they languished in prison and they suffered awful persecution and yet you'll find them in the midst of all that rejoicing in the

Lord and the thing that comes light here is the spirit in which they conducted themselves and there's a beautiful antithesis in this verse that is the bringing together of opposites I think it was J.A. Alexander that commented in the book of Acts who put it like this they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name they considered it an honour to be dishonoured and they considered it grace to be disgraced wasn't that wonderful but look it was for his name it was for his name you see nothing mattered to them but Jesus Christ and the gospel of course they had enemies but then Christ was with them of course they were confronted with other teaching but then they had the gospel they knew what he had said to them and the name means the revelation of Jesus in the Bible that's the meaning of the word name what Jesus has showed himself to be in his word and they believed all that and they accepted his teaching you know what happened to them because of that they were they were beaten and the Jewish penalty as you know we'll see later on was 39 strokes of the belt or perhaps you could say 39 strokes of the birch that was the penalty 39 strokes each

[45 : 37] Peter and John and what they do did they leave that place and they started mourning about well I thought this life was going to be better than this no they rejoiced they rejoiced because

they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the sake of Christ they carried about with them physically literally visibly what Paul refers to as the marks of the Lord Jesus Paul some years after this languishing in prison in Rome speaking to wasn't it Festus he said it it was Agrippa he said it to him oh Festus rather oh he said Agrippa said you know he said you're almost making me a Christian oh he said I wish I wish you were not only almost but all together he says I would give anything for you to be a Christian but I wouldn't give you these bonds and he was you can almost hear him holding up the chains with which you were shackled hands and feet the joy of the Christian life he said I would give you but

I wouldn't want you to have these chains what I want of a Christian spirit counted worthy to suffer shame for his name you know the disgrace as someone put it disgrace it is brought upon you because of Jesus Christ and shame because of Jesus can become music in your ears it can draw you closer to the Lord it can draw you closer to heaven there was a man in this island once he suffered greatly at the hands of the enemies of Jesus Christ whom he loved and he was a wonderful and a gracious and a beautiful soldier of Jesus Christ but people ridiculed him they made his life a misery on this earth you know what that man used to do would you believe this his heart was so full of the joy of the Lord that he used to go to the place where his body was going to rest in the grave and I'm told that he used to kiss the ground because that one day my body is going to go in there is going to stay united to Christ till it rises again in the resurrection to be forever with the Lord you see there are men in the world and women there are boys and girls who are prepared to suffer shame for the name of Jesus Christ prepared to suffer disgrace for his sake prepared to be laughed at to be sneered to be mocked to be ridiculed to be called names for the sake of Jesus Christ of course there are people like that in the world and I will say this to you that if you're going to associate yourselves with these people you may as well be prepared for that as well you too will suffer shame for his name people are going to disgrace you as well and this is what I said earlier on tonight there are many men in Stornoway tonight they don't come to this church they're afraid to come here they don't want you see they're cowards at heart they don't want people to speak about them they've come to church maybe they've been here for years and years and years what are their mates going to see them if they see them walking up kennesty to come to the free church in Stornoway oh no they wouldn't dare put themselves into that place of suffering and shame and disgrace well let me say this to you they could say worse things about you and we take that step further if you took the step tonight to come to Jesus

Christ to receive repentance and forgiveness I've no doubt that some people would laugh at you but again they would laugh at you for doing they could laugh at you for doing worse things than that what a step will be for you tonight to come to the prince and to the saviour of sinners to receive what he can give you and you say ah well but who was it who said I can't remember who said this that you know he said it may be that the laugh of the ungodly is keeping you from Christ ah well my friend you just accept the laugh of the ungodly and you come to him and you remember that you will suffer that and you will probably have to suffer worse than that as well but you must stand up to it and the way you can stand up to it is in this way you have your heart filled with his love and you be determined to obey his command and you keep on witnessing for him and he will see to it that you will be upheld by his grace it's a wonderful privilege to be called a follower of Christ to be called a believer in Christ and as

Paul put it in writing to the Philippians it has been given to you he said not only to believe in him but also to suffer for his sake how many of you here tonight are prepared to accept that and how many of you are not prepared to accept it because of the shame that is associated with it well I say this to you shame on you if that's your aptitude pain dear you so enough I love you and let you can hey may anyone have come iyi if man last day let rep to you he people come