

Nothing can Stop Jesus' Gospel Going Out

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Date: 14 April 2024

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[0 : 00] Amen. Back in chapter 4 of Acts, what we see is some hostility towards the apostles. Peter and John, they were preaching, they finished preaching, and what happens? They got lifted.

The Paulos came in, they got lifted, they were taken off to the jail, and yet despite that, 5,000 people that day were saved. After this, we see great blessing in the church at the end of chapter 4. They're generous people. Then you see the story of Ananias and Sapphira, falsehoods, hypocrisy also within the church, which needs uprooted. And here we see again, at the beginning of our passage, great blessing once again in the church, and yet, once again, opposition.

What I want us to do with this passage is think of it as a bit like a boxing match, or rather, a bit more like a wrestling match. Not one which is a fair fight. Think WWE wrestling.

One where the outcome is known before the fight takes place. And this is all taking place.

Everything we're going to read of is very much in the shadow of the temple.

[1 : 13] As I mentioned earlier, Luke is really keen to show us that God's power is no longer in the temple, but in the local church, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

So what we have, therefore, in our passage, it's not rage in a cage. It's not rumble in the jungle. It's things that are going mental at the temple.

That's the wrestling match we've got for us here. Pushing the analogy too far, honestly, let's think first at pre-match hospitality, where we see this unprecedented blessing. In fact, actually, before we look there, just look back at verse 29 of chapter 4.

Look at what the church is praying for here. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant, Jesus. That's what the church is praying for. And then what happens?

[2 : 19] The prayer is answered. It's obvious, isn't it? They pray for it. The Lord answers it. Here we see his prayer answered, and God is authenticating the message of the apostles.

That's the reason for the signs of miracles, authenticating them to the world and their message, that they are his messengers with his message. And here are the apostles now, chapter 5, all together now in Solomon's portico.

Verse 13, we're not sure who the others are watching there. The commentators aren't sure, but here's what we do know about them. We know just before Ananias and Sapphira were struck down by God.

We know the last time they were here in Solomon's portico, Peter and John got lifted. It's fair enough in some ways, isn't it, for them to be a bit wary of them in verse 13?

And yet in spite of that, they're held in the highest team of the apostles. See that? And then we see a truly remarkable verse in verse 14. Let me show you the context of why it's so remarkable.

[3 : 25] 2.41, those who accepted his message were baptized, and about 3,000 were added number that day. 4.4, but many who heard the message believed.

So the number of men, not including women and children, who believed, grew to about 5,000. So about 3,000 saved in one sermon. Over 5,000 saved in another.

And then 5.14, look at this. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. Isn't that what's staggering?

Should be. Even more than over 5,000 being added. Incredible verse. What we read of here really is unprecedented blessing for the church.

More people than ever being saved. More people being healed by Jesus through the apostles. Just Peter's shadow falling on them. And people are healed. That's remarkable.

[4 : 25] And we see here the gospel is beginning to creep out beyond Jerusalem. As Jesus said it would, but not fully yet. The gospel is going out.

Jesus is accrediting his message and his messengers. And there's unprecedented blessing in the church. But once again, this growth in the church draws the attention of the Jewish leadership. Let's look at round one. Snatched but standing and speaking. Look at verse 17 and 18. Then the high priest and all his associates who are members of the party of the Sadducees were filled with jealousy.

They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. Last time, Peter and John were arrested. And really got a slap in the wrist for it.

Not much more than that. This time though, it's as if, well, it's as if unmarked vans have swept into Solomon's portico. Men with balaclavas have jumped out.

[5 : 31] They've grabbed all of the apostles. They've bundled them in and have driven off with them. That's the plan here really, isn't it? Grab the leaders. Put them in a cold jail cell overnight. Public trial the next day.

Where those who grab them are judge, jury and executioner. Stories you read of really of the church, isn't there? Elsewhere in the world. Iran, Hong Kong, Russia, these sorts of places. The opponent grabbed, chucked in a van, held and put on public trial. Why? Why are they doing this?

Well, to show who's in charge. To show who has the power. Yet all that really does, doesn't it? Is show us who is the one who has the power.

And it certainly isn't the religious authorities, is it? Look from verse 19. But during the night, an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. Go. Stand in the temple court, he said.

[6 : 38] And tell the people all about this new life. At daybreak, they entered the temple courts, as they'd been told. And began to teach the people. I mean, it's remarkable, isn't it?

Just notice where the angel commands them to go. To go back to the very place they just got lifted from. And what are they to do? Do the very thing they were doing before.

Tell the people. Tell the people about this new life. What is this life? Well, it's the life that God provides through Jesus. It's not a lifestyle choice.

It's not a phrase. It's not a trend. But it is eternal life in the resurrected Jesus. The very thing they've been proclaiming. It's a message, therefore, that is too important to have any authorities to stop them from saying.

Hence why the angel commands them. Why God commands them to carry on speaking. This is too big a deal not to. And so what do the apostles do? Well, they crack on, don't they? They crack on with teaching people and telling them about Jesus.

[7 : 50] But Luke, who records this for us like a Quentin Tarantino film. Cutscene, doesn't he? Cutscene to what's going on elsewhere. Back to Sanhedrin. Where the Jewish religious ruling council are.

All the might and pomp and ceremony on show. The might of the leaders come in. And they call for the prisoners. But word comes back in verse 23.

They're not there. And yet the cell is still locked. You can imagine the whispers. The confusion around the chamber.

What's going on? Who did this? No one knows. And right at this moment, someone runs in.

Look at verse 25. Then someone came and said, Look, the men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts, teaching the people. It's great, isn't it?

[8 : 51] The people they arrested for speaking are no longer in the jail, but now they're out of it. Speaking still about Jesus. What happened? The apostles were snatched. How's it end?

And they're standing and speaking. So the temple guards. The captain with the officers. The big dogs.

The ones who really don't want to mess with. The heavies. This time they go in to get the apostles. But this time, notice. They can't use force.

Look at verse 26. At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force because they feared that the people would stone them.

In all of this, who is the one fearing? It's not the apostles, is it? But the people sent to bring them in. When you read this, I can't even think of Psalm 2.

[9 : 53] God is in heaven. And he laughs at the plans of men. Can you imagine that, can't you, in this scene? Religious leaders do this to the apostles.

Look at this. Look what I'm going to do. What does it mean for us? God is on his throne. Hebrews 13, verse 6.

The Lord is my helper. I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? Psalm 46. God is our refuge and strength.

An ever-present help in times of trouble. Friends, as it's been said very often, we are not the apostles. But we follow the apostles' God.

God, if you follow Jesus, you will face opposition for doing so. As Bon Accord grows. As Bon Accord grows.

[10 : 57] As a church, you will face opposition as it grows. It could be criticism from friends. It could be criticism from friends. From family. It could be alienation, being ignored, getting kicked out of WhatsApp groups.

No longer getting invites. But we need not fear. We need not fear. We may even look forgotten about. But we need not fear.

I wonder if you've noticed this before. But the songs we sing together in the local church are a ministry of the word.

As we sing, we speak truth and love to one another. And we need to remember the great truths of the Bible in the songs we sing. God is on his throne.

We need not fear. We're going to sing at the end. Unto the grave, what shall we sing? Christ he lives. Christ he lives.

[12 : 04] And what reward will heaven bring? Everlasting life with him. We need not fear. Because Christ is on his throne.

Round one. The apostles won. Jewish authorities, nil. Let's look at round two together. Charged but committed to Christ.

The apostles are brought back again, aren't they? They're brought towards the religious council. And let's remember, most of the apostles, these guys, they're tradies. The white van men. Simple working class guys.

Some of them fishermen. Guys who probably had never been to school, didn't know how to read or write, never been to seminary before, gone to university. And who are they against? The religious elites.

The Sanhedrin. The bigwigs in Jerusalem. The guys who run the show. The guys who run the show. The well-educated. The ones who control the affairs of the city. The high priest begins his speech.

[13 : 10] And it is a speech. There's no questions towards them, is there? Rather, it's just really his statements he makes in verse 28. And all he can really do to them is say that you've ignored what I asked you to do. Don't speak about Jesus.

And look at Peter's response. Gosh. Verse 29. Peter and the other apostles replied, We must obey God rather than human beings.

I mean, talk about a mic drop moment. It's remarkable what he says, isn't it? Peter's not trying to be a smart aleck.

He's just telling the truth. He is completely right. Peter defends his unashamed proclamation of the gospel, having been commissioned by the risen Lord Jesus himself.

And look how he goes on to defend himself. He shows how Jesus fulfills God's plan for salvation. Verse 30. He goes back to Abraham. The God of our fathers.

[14 : 20] Then to Deuteronomy. Cursed is the one who dies on a tree. Although you may have seen Jesus as cursed. He's saying God did not.

He was faithful to him. So he was vindicated, exalted, risen from the dead. And he's now at the right hand of the father. And what's he doing there? What's Jesus doing right now across the world? Giving repentance. Offering forgiveness of sins. Peter's saying that's not in the temple anymore. It's in Jesus.

Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises. Not the temple. And Jesus is giving this forgiveness as our leader. As our savior.

He's a great Greek word. He's our archeagos. Is that great word? He's our leader. What does that mean? He has a preeminent position. Peter's saying basically he's equal with God.

[15 : 22] This Jesus we proclaim is God. The living, dying, resurrected, reigning Jesus. He's gone ahead of us. He's leading us. He's our champion. And he has won salvation for us.

And he is the focal point of all of God's plan for salvation. And what Peter's showing them should be good news to them. It's showing them that they are not therefore a threat to the nation.

As they fear. It's been said this is the opportunity for them to be blessed by God. In the way they're hoping to be. Because salvation is in this Jesus alone.

Therefore was Peter's response in verse 29 not right. Of course we must obey God rather than man. These men are charged for breaking the rules by speaking about Jesus.

But don't bottle it. Even though Peter is the great bottler isn't he? In the gospels. Instead they stand committed to Christ.

[16 : 30] So here's the question if we know ourselves. How? How is Peter able to say this?

How are the apostles able to do this? Because it's true? Well yes. Let's be honest. Who here hasn't bottled it when talking about Jesus?

I've mentioned earlier just to be completely honest. Going to this rugby tour with the club. I am so scared. I'm so scared. I'm so scared in many ways. One of the reasons why I'm scared is because I know how easy it is to bottle it when the question comes.

To answer the question, how is Peter able to say this? Peter is able to stand and speak because of what he and the apostles and the church had been doing in the meantime.

What they had been doing? Praying for boldness. That's what we see in chapter 4 verses 23 onwards. They pray for boldness.

[17 : 40] And for the Holy Spirit to give boldness. And that prayer is answered. So I think this is a prayer that God loves to answer.

Give me boldness to speak about Jesus. When do I many of us need to start praying that? No, I do in the morning. Lord, give me boldness because I'm scared.

Give me boldness to live for Jesus. Boldness to speak about Jesus. Remember, this is not fearlessness. That's not what boldness is. Boldness is doing it even when you're scared.

The thing with Acts, in the book of Acts, is every time we see the Holy Spirit come upon someone, what happens? He enables them to speak. To speak with boldness.

Look again at verse 28. Look at what they're charged with. We strictly charge you not to teach in this name. Yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching.

[18 : 51] Friends, if there's ever a charge brought against Bon Accord Free Church, maybe this charge. That you have filled Aberdeen with the teaching of Jesus.

How do the apostles do it? How do they get this charge? What is it that makes people risk reputations?

Great or small? What will make us able to do this? Look at verse 32. We are witnesses of these things.

And so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him. Literally, they're saying, And so is the Holy Spirit who God gave past tense to those who are obeying him in the present tense.

Obedience to Jesus, therefore, is one of the signs the Holy Spirit has been given to you. That you have been saved. So this radical obedience to Jesus, therefore, comes from the Holy Spirit.

[19 : 59] Through prayerful obedience. Friends, that's the story of every church has ever been.

The story of the gospel going throughout the nations is through houses, friendship groups, communities, filled with the teaching of Jesus because people are obeying God, having received the Holy Spirit.

Giving boldness to fill conversations with Jesus, doing what they can. Boldness to obey Jesus rather than men or women. Not fearlessness, but boldness to do it, even when we're scared.

What might that look like for some of us? Will it be standing in the law courts, being prosecuted for Jesus? Probably not for most of us, let's be honest. Some of us it could be.

More likely for some of us it might very well look like in the employment tribunal. It might look like in the head teacher's office. It might be for a committee of a group we're part of.

For some of us it's probably in the most difficult place of all. School playground. In the corridors. For all of us it will be in a day-to-day conversations with friends and families.

[21 : 11] What do we need to be doing? Praying for boldness. Praying for boldness now. Praying for boldness. So when the opportunities come to speak, we can make use of them by the power of the Holy Spirit.

But verse 29 will only be true of us though, of course, if we have drunk deep from the fountain of God's grace. When we know our salvation is in Christ and not in what people think of us. I mean, when we have the smiles of heaven over us, who cares what people think of us? Really, let's be honest.

When we know we are safe in Christ, we will live for him and speak for him. If we know Christ, as we read here, is our leader, our champion, has gone ahead, has won eternal salvation for us. That we are in his safe hands eternally. Knowing that he is ever present with us by the Holy Spirit. Then will we be able to say, verse 29, that we must obey God.

[22 : 15] Round two. Jewish apostles, two. Jewish leaders, nil. Finally, let's look at round three. Reprimanded, but rejoicing and remaining steadfast.

Needless to say, Peter gives a speech. Doesn't go down well, does it? Verse 33. When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. Furious and understatement, they're raging at this.

The next time we see this describing them, it's when they're stoning Stephen to death later in chapter 7. These boys in the council, they've heard Peter speak. And they are raging and they want the apostles dead.

That's what's happening here. And then comes something very, very unexpected. Read with me from verse 34.

But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed the Sanhedrin.

[23 : 17] Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago, Judas appeared, claiming to be somebody. And about 400 men rallied to him. He was killed.

All his followers were dispersed. And all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed.

And all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case, I advise you, leave these men alone. Let them go. For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail.

But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men. You will only find yourselves fighting against God. What's Gamaliel saying to them? He's saying, well, remember these uprisings you saw before.

People claiming perhaps to be the Messiah. When that person's killed, well, the whole thing dies off. He's saying, let's just wait. Let's see what happens. So plan simple.

[24 : 15] Do nothing. It makes sense, doesn't it? Remember that people are scared of the public here. They don't want to risk opposing God as well.

So what's Gamaliel doing? Well, he's hedging his bets. He's playing it safe. And everyone buys into it. Maybe you're here in some ways, you're a bit like Gamaliel.

There are some things about Jesus. Some things you like about him. Some things you know about him. But there's other things you're just not sure about.

After all, how can you trust someone you've never seen before? Well, let's learn from Gamaliel and see that what he offers isn't a middle way.

It might sound safe. But it is still a rejection. He's still rejecting Jesus by not believing the apostles, by not believing the message.

[25 : 14] He sounds wise, Gamaliel. Of course he does. But he's fudging it. Well, he says sounds wise, but it's a foolish decision. And look what happens next in verse 40.

His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and let them go.

The apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name. Day after day in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

We are not the apostles, but we have the apostles' king. And like them, we follow in his footsteps. We follow in the path of a king who is crucified.

But notice here this path of suffering and following Jesus is also the path of joy. Jesus, well, why do they have joy?

[26 : 17] They have joy because they're able to serve Jesus and be counted for him. Jesus has given his all for them. And so they were glad to give their all in service of him.

And just remember the bigger picture of what's going on here. Jesus promised that his gospel go out from Jerusalem. And what's happened now? Jerusalem is filled with the gospel.

How could they not rejoice in that? Imagine if you guys are getting flack for following Jesus. And yet at the same time, the local councils are saying, Aberdeen's filled with the gospel of Jesus.

You'd take the flack, wouldn't you? How can we not rejoice in that? I wish we'd time to share stories of the gospel growing around the world.

In Scotland, churches small across the globe, it certainly isn't. Why? Because nothing can stop Jesus' gospel growing out. That's what Luke's showing us here this morning.

[27 : 21] But let me end with a quote I read on this passage from a minister called Tony Merida. He writes this. Do you want real Christian joy? Then follow the Acts model.

Be compassionate towards the needy. Be bold in your Christian witness. Be filled with integrity, respect and humility before people. You will face opposition and you will be filled with joy.

Not just now, but even a billion years from now. You will never regret having suffered for the name. Christians can take a beating with joy because Jesus took the ultimate beating for us, even rising from the dead for us.

One day we'll be with this king forever. And there we shall rejoice forever. Let me pray. Amen.

Amen. Amen.