

Jesus is Finished, and 3 Other Misconceptions

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[0 : 00] let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray together. We read in Acts chapter 2, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for a rain shelter this morning, for shelter from the storm, to engage with you together. Father, we ask that you'll fill each of us with your spirit, that we would hear your voice in the scriptures and be encouraged and equipped to make Jesus known in the world. Father, we trust your love for us, your grace to us, your acceptance of us. So we pray, correct us where we need to be corrected.

Lord, comfort us where we need comfort and work in us what's pleasing to you, for we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. So we're a church all about Jesus and this morning we're looking at some remarkable things that Jesus did.

And if we heard an introduction like that to any sermon in a church like St. Silas on any Sunday, I guess we wouldn't be surprised. But it's more of a surprise today because the man Jesus is not physically present in Acts chapter 5, and yet it is unmistakably Jesus at work.

[1 : 34] Luke records for us these events that after Jesus died, he rose from the dead, he commissioned his disciples, he sent his Holy Spirit for his people, and he is continuing to be at work.

So in verse 12, we read the apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And while some people don't dare to join them, in verse 14, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.

And these things are not done in a corner. We're seeing, aren't we, the news, we've just been praying about the coronavirus epidemic on the news. Well, think about what it must have been like here in this great city of Jerusalem, as in verses 15 and 16, the sick are carried to the apostles, the hospitals are emptied, and people are being brought on mats just to try and get them near this undeniable healing power.

And the apostle Peter, in the midst of it all, is adamant, we're just people. This cannot be from us. We couldn't do these things. But the miracles are like signposts, signs and wonders, and that is that through them, Jesus is pointing the people and pointing us, as we read the testimony, he's pointing us to the reality that he is alive, and he is who he claimed to be, and he's continuing to be at work today.

And the work that Jesus is primarily doing in the world is making sure that people hear the saving news about him, news of who he is, of what he's done, what he's achieved at the cross, that he is powerful to give us life and to save us.

[3 : 16] And as he calls us, as the church today, to share that news, we get these fantastic events of Acts chapter 5. Now, sharing that news isn't easy, and so to encourage us to keep us going, I think in Acts chapter 5, we see three common misconceptions being taken away for us, three things that are not true about sharing Jesus.

So the first misconception, it's on the sheet there, is sharing God's saving news about Jesus makes you popular. You'd have thought that the religious authorities would have been thrilled to hear that at last, the promises of their scriptures have been fulfilled in Jesus.

But if you have a look at verse 17, we see their reaction. Then the high priest and all his associates who were members of the party of the Sadducees were filled with jealousy.

That is that they are powerful people in a religious society, and their power is being threatened by the claims of Jesus Christ, and it makes them jealous.

So verse 18, they arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. Later, we see a similar unpopularity as the apostles speak about Jesus in the court hearing before the Sanhedrin, which is the collection of the elders of the city.

[4 : 41] And the reaction is in verse 33, when they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. So in verse 40, they have the apostles flogged.

Probably that meant the 39 lashes, a brutal punishment that some people did die from. And here, as we see the early church taking off, we're seeing what has been true ever since.

That if you choose to speak about Jesus, it will be unpopular. You cannot be universally popular and speak about Jesus. People feel deeply threatened by Jesus and the claim that he died for our sins and he is now alive again to rule.

And Jesus warned them and us, didn't he, of that? He said, water you when all men speak well of you. In chapter 5 of Matthew, verse 11, he says, blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

And he said, if the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. And we see that all around the world today. the unreached people of the world today who are still unreached, they often really don't want to be reached with the news about Jesus.

[6 : 01] And a number of us know a refugee in Glasgow who's in our church family who said he's happy for me to share this. That he, I was talking to him about the danger he went through to get to Glasgow, to the UK as he arrived at the end of last year.

And he described his journey, traumatic journey through the mountains, in a boat, in a lorry. And he said to me, Martin, I had no choice. If I'd stayed in my country, having become a Christian, they would have killed me.

Why? What was he doing that was causing such a reaction? All he'd done was host a small group of friends in his home looking at a passage from the Bible. And when his home then got raided and they found passages of Scripture printed out for the group, he was threatened with death.

I knew that threat was real and he would have to leave. And you wonder, what are people so afraid of in these regimes, these brutal regimes of a little group of people looking at the text about Jesus, at God's Word?

Such great cost to become a Christian. And while our situation in Glasgow is so different to that, yet the heat is being turned up on speaking about Jesus in Scotland.

[7 : 20] And this week the news was about Franklin Graham, he was the son of Billy Graham, he was a man who spoke to many millions of people in his lifetime about Jesus. And his son Franklin is touring the UK in May and he booked, his organization had booked the Hydro, the SSC Hydro to speak at a big event so that Christians in churches across Glasgow could bring friends and hear him explain the Christian faith and invite people to respond.

And there's training arranged in build-up to that in churches around Glasgow, there are Elim Pentecostal churches hosting that and Downvale Free Church is hosting it and the Tron at Kelvin Grove are hosting that, you know, gospel friends of ours.

And last week the Hydro pulled out and cancelled Franklin Graham's event. And there are different reasons why they've done that but what the presenting issue is, is that Franklin Graham has a track record of speaking very strongly against same-sex marriage and against Islam.

And there's lots about Franklin Graham and his methods and his manner that personally I find difficult. I don't particularly like. And at St. Silas we've not partnered with him in the mission but at the end of the day he is a Christian and his explanation of the gospel would have been faithful and I guess still will be faithful when he comes somewhere in Glasgow as they look for a different venue. And the petition that started the protests against the Hydro hosting Franklin Graham for that event was started by a Church of Scotland minister. Just as we see in Acts that it's often the religious powers that be, the religious establishment that stand in opposition to people plainly speaking about Jesus.

[9 : 05] So I know it's complex. I get that Franklin Graham he's a divisive character with his politics and his manner but it is a sad situation when in our culture a man who wants to speak about Jesus is barred from a venue and some of it is because it's Jesus and Jesus is not popular.

And maybe we need to just be reminded of that personally in Acts chapter 5. You know, we've got events coming up here next month in March 20th to the 22nd. We've got Roger Simpson coming who over his lifetime has been a great communicator about Jesus and he was here two Sundays

ago gearing us up for his visit and we'll have events he'll bring people speaking about Jesus and it's very inspiring to have our faith raised in what God could accomplish among our friends and at the same time we just need to remember as we go and speak about Jesus to people as we invite people that you can't do that and be liked by everybody.

Even perhaps just remembering if we invite friends and it makes us unpopular that's not necessarily that we've done something wrong. We don't then think oh gosh I must have played that wrong for people to react like that.

Let's stop doing that. It might be that we find someone just sighs in disappointment as we hand them a flyer because they're annoyed that we've made it awkward for them that they want to say no or that a friend gives us a look of scorn or that we're left worrying that word will spread around the office that oh you better stay away from them they're trying to invite people to this event and we feel talked about behind our backs.

It's not that big a deal but it's just the feeling of not being popular and we just need to be prepared for that. If what matters most to you is being liked then you won't speak about Jesus.

[11:01] It's not popular so what keeps the apostles going? I guess they would have enjoyed being popular and they would have been naturally fearful of the religious hierarchy in Jerusalem clamping down on them.

How do they keep going? Well the second misconception that Acts 5 helps us deal with is sharing God's saving news about Jesus is optional.

In verse 28 the apostles are brought in and they're questioned by the high priest notice he can't bring himself to mention Jesus by name. We saw this in chapter 4 as well.

So verse 28 he says have a look we gave you strict orders not to teach in this name yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood. and so they show real heroism heroic courage in verse 29 Peter and the other apostles replied we must obey God rather than human beings.

[12:10] So here's a key question why did the apostles make that connection? Why would it be disobeying God if they were to stop speaking about Jesus?

presumably the Sanhedrin thought they were obeying God. The answer I think is that this is the implication of what God has done to Jesus.

So for the third time already in these early chapters of Acts we have a speech from Peter about Jesus where he says the same thing about Jesus. He says you killed him, God raised him, we saw him.

Verse 30 the God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. You killed him, God raised him. After God raised him he crowned him as king of the world. God exalted him to his own right hand as prince and saviour. That word prince is a word that's used of, you could translate it champion, hero. It's a word used in Hebrews as pioneer or champion.

[13:17] God has exalted him. So how do we work out how to obey God? Well look at what God's done to Jesus. He's shown us that Jesus is the hero and he is the saviour because he raised him from the dead and exalted him in heaven.

One of our daughters was doing homework last week and she was learning about words with silent letters if you remember doing that. And there was this exercise she had to do where she had to spot the silent letter in each word and then she had to make up a sentence with the word in and write it down.

She came up to see me and she said I'm supposed to make up a sentence with the word tomb in. I love it when you get low hanging fruit to talk about with your, I said why don't you write in a real place just outside Jerusalem there is an empty tomb.

Because it's true isn't it and we don't know exactly where it is mercifully because if we did then there would be a whole carry on and we don't need a shrine in a place where Jesus rested for two days. But nobody ever produced the body there is an empty tomb because God has vindicated Jesus and said he is prince and savior. And that means that God offers to everybody in the world verse 31 forgiveness of everything they've done wrong and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[14:42] Now it's knowing that reality that transformed these apostles who had been cowering in fear as they saw Jesus get arrested and fled and denied him.

And now they're out in Jerusalem speaking about him with no fear of death. And their role as apostles was unique. They were the eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus but the command from Jesus

to make him known is for all people.

It's what we do because Jesus rose. we share him. It's not optional. Jesus said in Luke 24 that the scriptures had promised repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations beginning in Jerusalem.

It's what we do because Jesus rose. It's what we do because Jesus has equipped us to do it with the Holy Spirit. So in Acts chapter 2 the Spirit was sent at Pentecost and it empowered all of God's people not just the apostles to declare truth about God.

It's what we do because of Jesus commanding Acts chapter 1 or at least his assumption he says you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and to the ends of the earth.

[15 : 57] Hudson Taylor was a pioneering missionary to China went to China to tell people about Jesus. When he was 33 he came back from his first assignment in China and he was speaking in Perth in Scotland and he spoke to Christians, Scottish Christians in September 1865.

He told them the story of something that had happened to him in China. He was traveling on a boat, a junk, and a man he was with on the boat fell into the water and Hudson Taylor couldn't get the man out and he saw a fishing boat nearby with its dragnet in the water so they would be able to save the man.

And so he shouted to them, come quickly, a man is drowning over here. And they shouted back, it's not convenient. So he shouted again desperately, who cares about convenience, the man is drowning, come and save him.

And they said, we're busy fishing. He shouted, leave your fishing, a man is drowning, save him and I will pay you well. And they said, how much?

So he shouted some money over and they haggled over the price. And eventually they came over, but it was too late and the man had drowned. And he told this story in Perth and the audience were outraged at the immorality of the pagan fisherman.

[17 : 32] But Hudson said this, he said, we condemn those heathen fishermen, we say they were guilty of the man's death because they could easily have saved him and they did not do it. But what of the millions whom we leave to perish and that eternally?

What of the plain command that God has given us? Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Hudson Taylor woke up the church in Scotland to the reality that God's word and sharing God's word about Jesus, it's not optional for us.

And that's not that Jesus commands a stick to beat us up with, beat ourselves up with, it's more that there seems to just be an assumption in Acts that this is the natural response to realizing gloriously that Jesus is alive, that when we grasp Jesus rose, it drives us simply to be his witnesses.

So that's our second misconception, sharing Jesus is not optional. But how do we feel about that when we've just seen it's not popular, when people are not interested, when people are hostile towards us or towards the church?

Do we lose heart? Do we get anxious? I know I get anxious. I get anxious about the future of the church in Scotland.

[18 : 58] I get anxious about the future of society in Scotland. I get anxious as I look at the way that Jesus is rejected and think about the world that our kids are growing up in.

So here's our third misconception. Sharing God's saving news about Jesus can be stopped. These are great events in Acts chapter 5.

Every plan against Jesus gets thwarted and it's brilliant. They find the apostles speaking about Jesus and they put them in the public jail to get them locked away to lock away the word in verse 18.

In verse 19 have a look at what happens. Jesus intervenes 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 courts he said and tell the people all about this new life.

What a great description of their message. It's about this new life. Jesus is indestructibly alive and when you put your trust in him you share in his life.

[20 : 02] So the apostles they don't hang around. They don't think well it didn't go very well last time and let's just can we just do some charity work instead. No at daybreak they go straight back into the temple courts where they always went the same place they know they can be found and they start teaching.

Meanwhile brilliantly the Sanhedrin comes together. 71 members who were elders of Israel all very busy very important people picture the great and the good all filing in to the Sanhedrin and you can imagine the muttering can't you you know it was pretty difficult to get here with such short notice wasn't it you wouldn't believe what I've had to cancel to get here and they all file in and they all finally get into their seats and so they send security to bring the apostles in and the officer of the court gets to the jail and there's nobody in the cells.

The guards are there at the doors the doors are locked and they slide open the viewing panel and there's no one in there. And verse 24 is great isn't it for all the power on hearing this report the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss wondering what this might lead to. And then with perfect comedy timing in comes a guy who says you know those men you put in jail yesterday they're in the temple did you know that did you know that they're back in there where they always go and they're teaching people again.

So they head out there to get them and they bring them in. And the message from Jesus is you can't chain my word. If I want it to go out it will go out.

[21 : 36] So in chapter 3 they threatened the apostles and the church got together and they prayed for boldness. Now they imprison the apostles and an angel comes and sets them free. Then they command them not to speak and the apostles say we're going to obey God and not man.

They want to kill them and God uses the opinion of Gamaliel a pragmatist to change their mind and keep his people alive. So they have them brutally flogged and the apostles rejoice.

They're being disgraced. They thank God for the grace that they would suffer. Look at verse 41.

The apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name.

And then the outcome of all of that verse 42. 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.

He's unstoppable. That's the message of Acts chapter 5. I thought you'd enjoy a rugby illustration this morning. If you're Scottish don't walk out you'll enjoy this one.

[22 : 44] It reminds me a bit this of the rugby player Jonah Lomu. He actually died a few years ago. But he played rugby for the All Blacks. If you remember him it was in the 90s. He played in the 1995 World Cup and it was a hugely enjoyable game if you were Scottish because they played England in the semi-final of the 1995 World Cup.

And Jonah Lomu was just unstoppable. It was ridiculous. He was 6 foot 5. He weighed 120 kilos. He could run 100 metres in 10 seconds.

Will Carlin the England captain said about Jonah Lomu he's a freak and the sooner he goes away the better. In one of Jonah Lomu's four tries that day he just ran over the England fullback Mike Katz.

He just ran him over. There was just no stopping the man. It was totally embarrassing. And when you watch Jonah Lomu whatever country you were from what you were left thinking was I wish I was on his team.

He is so good. I just want to be on his team and pass the ball to him. And that's what Acts 5 shows us about Jesus that he is totally unstoppable. As though God is asking you and me this morning don't you want to be on my son's team?

[24 : 04] Don't stand against him. Don't sit on the terraces and keep an open mind. Get on the team with him. Wouldn't that be thrilling? To join him in making the gospel about him known so that you watch and see him at work.

There is another valuable implication of that isn't there of Acts chapter 5. It's that we can view every event in our lives through a lens that says Acts chapter 5 whatever happens here Jesus is still powerful.

He's totally in control to do whatever he wants to do. Whatever happens Jesus is loving his mission to save people cost him everything. Whatever happens Jesus is wise he knows exactly what he's doing and that means nothing can happen to you or me that is outside his control.

Maybe you could ask yourself for reflection where do I most need to hear that again today for myself? for the times when we do feel real sadness when we fear for the future when we look back at real disappointments about how things have gone in our lives for our grief Acts chapter 5 reminds us it encourages us Jesus is powerful Jesus is loving Jesus is wise you can trust him it makes such a difference when you're in the valley don't let yourself forget Jesus is in control you can trust him and the spirit says to us in these chapters of Acts that Jesus great priority until his return is that

God's saving word about him gets shared by his people he is more concerned with that than he is with our comfort so he has showered us with gifts he showered us with gifts of skills and experiences and money and relationships to use to get behind his goal his vision his strategy and he's not given up on Glasgow so could you get behind his work this week could you pray for that just as even the apostle Paul who we look on as very brave he asks people in Colossians would you pray for me that the

Lord will open doors of opportunity for me and will you help that he'll help me be brave enough to take them let's pray that for ourselves pray that for friends that we're in prayer triplets with for open doors and for boldness Kathy and I were chatting about what's happened this week with Franklin Graham and the petitions that were lodged about Franklin Graham coming and the hydro pulling out and just thinking how increasingly in Glasgow it feels as though there are people who when they think of Christians especially of evangelical Christians Christians what bounces into their head is a picture of highly political Republican party Americans portrayed through the lens of the British media and that's their image of an evangelical Christian it's impersonal and it's disconnected from them what a difference it makes to anyone in Glasgow if when they think of Christians they think of you they think of you their colleague their classmate their friend and the life you're living in front of them the faith that you've shared with them it makes all the difference

[27 : 44] God has put you in a set of relationships to be an ambassador for Christ and Jesus is in control to use that for himself sharing Jesus will be unpopular but it's not optional because he is alive and his word is unstoppable let's pray together we praise you Lord Jesus Christ that you were raised and exalted that you are prince and saviour help us respond rightly to you help us not to be naive that sharing you is unpopular but by your spirit embolden us we pray to speak about you to those around us knowing that your saving word is unstoppable and as we do that we pray that your spirit will open people's eyes convict people of their sin and their need for a saviour and draw them to you in repentance for forgiveness we pray that for their good for our joy and for your glory amen God and for us going on to dis