

Tales of the Unexpected..

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[0 : 00] The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed, so the number of men who believed grew to about 5,000.

The next day the rulers, the elders, and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas, the high priest, was there, and so was Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and others of the high priest's family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them. By what power or what name do you do this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, Rulers and elders of the people, if we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel. It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.

[1 : 29] Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved. When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together.

What are we going to do with these men? They asked. Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign and we cannot deny it. But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.

Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, Which is right in God's eyes?

To listen to you or to him? You be the judges. As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard. And after further threats, they let them go.

[2 : 47] They could not decide how to punish them because all the people were praising God for what had happened. For the man who was miraculously healed was over 40 years old. On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. Sovereign Lord, they said, You made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them.

You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David. Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.

Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.

They did what your power and your will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

[3 : 57] Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus. After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks, Trevor, for reading. If you could keep your Bibles open at Acts chapter 4, that would be a huge help to me.

It's page 1095 as we look at that together. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you'd find that helpful as we turn to this portion of the Bible.

Let's ask for God's help. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit and that by his work of grace and power, your words can come to us as words that give life.

So, Father, we pray that you will give us ears to hear, heads that can understand, and hearts that are willing to change and follow you. For we ask in Jesus' name.

[5 : 06] Amen. Well, we took a break last week from our series in Acts, but that's what we're doing as a church family. In most of our mornings over the coming weeks, we're in a series in Acts.

It's the second book of the Bible by Luke, a doctor who wrote Luke's gospel, his gospel account of Jesus' life, really showing all that starts with Jesus' birth, but going through into Jesus' life, his death, his resurrection.

And Acts is his account, really, of what Jesus continued to do through his first apostles and the early church. So, this morning, we have a tale of the unexpected.

Lots of unexpected things happen. And the first is the rulers arresting Peter and John, making an unexpected arrest. And the backdrop to what happens came at the beginning of chapter three of Acts.

We looked at it a couple of weeks ago. Peter and John were on their way up to the temple in Jerusalem, and they saw a beggar who was lame, and Peter healed him in Jesus' name.

[6 : 07] In the name of Jesus Christ, get up and walk. And the man was completely restored, muscles restored. He stood up. He was leaping around. Then Peter turned to the onlookers, and he addressed them, and he urged them, turn back to God and be forgiven in Jesus' name.

Now, why did he say that? Why did he connect those two things, the healing and turning back to God? Because the healing is a demonstration that Jesus is alive.

Peter can't heal anyone. It must be that Jesus has risen from the dead, and he is at work. So, if Jesus is alive, he's the king, turn back to God through him.

So, hearing this, somebody calls security, and that's what happens in chapter 3, verse, sorry, chapter 4, verse 1. If you just have a look at chapter 4, verse 1, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people, and in verse 3, they arrest them, and they put them in jail.

Why is it unexpected? Because they've healed somebody, and this is the religious establishment seeing in their midst the power of God for good and arresting those who are involved.

[7 : 24] Why would they do that? The answer is because people oppose Jesus Christ. If you just look at how central the name Jesus is to everything in the chapter, in verse 7, they say, by what power or what name did you do this?

And the answer comes from Peter and John in verse 9. Peter says, if we're being called to account today for an act of kindness, shown to a man who was lame, and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel, it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

So then over the page, the conclusion of the council of the priests comes in verse 16. They say, what are we going to do with these men? Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they've performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it, but to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.

Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. So, Acts is the story of God's unstoppable, saving words, going out from those first followers of Jesus to the ends of the earth, and it's had an exhilarating start, as in Acts chapter 2, the Holy Spirit is sent by God and 3,000 people are baptized and we're up and running, but now we hit this potential significant obstacle to the word going out.

It's that Jesus Christ is opposed. There is opposition centered on Jesus Christ. And it's a vital chapter for us as a church, as the church today, because we see that opposition in the world today.

[9 : 23] We could think of Sri Lanka last year on Easter Sunday when Christians were killed celebrating Jesus' resurrection. Or it's not hard to see the news any day.

Last week in Kenya, three Christian teachers killed for no other reason than that they are Christians. Christians. We might think about China, where over recent decades there has been phenomenal, extraordinary church growth.

And yet, returnee students who we meet here who are Chinese and have gone back to China say how the crackdown they're now seeing on the church in the last two or three years in China is stronger than they've ever seen.

And house churches are being demolished. The government just this month in China has enacted a new law that every religious establishment in China must promote the values of the Communist Party.

And there are house churches in five provinces of China where they've got so big, there's no secret that they meet because so many people go to these churches.

[10:31] But they were instructed last month that they mustn't do anything to mark Christmas. And so they're being really clamped down on. The heat is turned up. Now for us in Glasgow today, things are very different, aren't they?

And we enjoy legal freedom to meet together and we thank God for that. We're actually legally free to live out our faith and to share our faith with other people.

But it's worth saying, isn't it, that although our situation is very different to certain other parts of the world, the heat is being turned up on the Christian faith in our country, in our workplaces, in our schools, in the media, and maybe you find among your friends that it's just a strong unsaid pressure to stay quiet, not to mention that you're a Christian, not to say what you really think about something as a Christian.

For the early church, the opposition was centered on Jesus. We see that in this chapter. And for my money, we could say the same thing is true today, that we can mention, we can mention God to people, often without much offense, not everywhere, but sometimes we can do that.

We can mention church if we say it's something that we go to, somewhere we go. We might find that we can mention prayer. We can say to someone, I'm praying for you, and they're not offended by that.

[11:53] But it's when we get to the name Jesus that it really feels that we've gone out of bounds. One Friday, just before Christmas, I got together with a couple of friends at a bar, six degrees north, nearby, and we were catching up.

Just these guys I've not seen for a while, so we're catching up as you do. We're talking about holidays and Christmas busyness, and then, obviously they know I'm a minister, so the conversation turns to the typical, the inevitable.

Someone says, oh, it must be a busy time of year for you. You know, you're a minister. And at that point, I've got a choice, haven't I? I can say, yeah, do you know what?

It takes ages to light all those candles, which is what I usually say. Or I can say something about activity, about ministries, about writing talks.

I can talk about, around the job. Or I can say something about Jesus. I can mention Jesus. And to say Jesus really feels as though you're crossing a pain barrier, doesn't it?

[12:59] I'm sure it's the same for many of us. You feel the awkwardness about using his name. And so we need to think about how we respond to that kind of pressure, opposition.

If we don't think about that, then what will we do? We'll just go quiet. The temptation will be just to be quiet. And I've heard people say before, maybe one of the reasons we don't get as much opposition in Scotland today is because we're quiet.

Get on with loving people, get on with serving people, doing good things. No one minds that. But let's be quiet about Jesus himself because people don't like hearing about him.

So we see how the apostles respond here in Acts chapter 4. In verse 18, the prohibition on them is emphatic. They're commanded not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

But look at the courage of verse 19. But Peter and John replied, Which is right in God's eyes, to listen to you or to him?

[14:06] You be the judges. As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard. Now what moved them to be so brave in the face of opposition?

Well, first, it's what they believe about Jesus. So that's our next point. Peter believes in an unexpected saviour. Peter says, It's Jesus who healed this man.

In verse 10, It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified, you killed him. But whom God raised from the dead, God raised him, that this man stands before you healed. Here in this healing miracle is a demonstration before your eyes that Jesus is who he claimed to be. He is alive again and he's at work. So what does that demonstrate about Jesus? Peter uses an Old Testament illustration in verse 11. He says, Jesus is the stone you builders rejected which has become the cornerstone. He's the most important stone in the building that God is building in the world today.

[15 : 13] If you think about a building, I was thinking about Orinmore. If you think about Orinmore on the corner of Byers Road and Great Western Road there, as it got converted into an arts centre some years ago, just imagine as the contractors were coming in and building and gutting the place and turning it into a theatre and a bar and all these workmen were working on the building and imagine some contractors come along one day and they see this huge circular object and they don't know what to do with it so they just throw it in the skip.

They think, that must be an old thing, let's just get rid of that and then they come back later as the project is finished and they see that it's the halo on top of the steeple. It's the main thing everyone knows about that building is it's got a halo around the steeple. It's the most important bit and imagine they just discarded it. They just missed that it was even useful. That's what's gone on with God's building, his people, his church and Jesus that he was discarded as though he was of no use by the religious leaders and he is the very building, the very stone God is using to build everything.

Without him and his death on the cross there is no building because none of us can join into the people of God. It was completely unexpected but they can see now that that's the reality.

[16 : 34] Jesus is at work vindicating those who followed him, showing that he's alive and so Peter spells out the implication in verse 12. He says, salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

What he believes about Jesus compels him to keep speaking even when Jesus is opposed. Salvation is found in no one else. There is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

And people are offended by that message. That's why Jesus is opposed. It's offensive if you don't think you need saving and these religious leaders didn't think they needed saving.

Just as today it takes humility for any of us doesn't it? If you're looking into Jesus to come to trust him is to recognize on my own before God I'm not good enough and I need to be saved and so I'm going to call on Jesus' name and he'll save me.

It's also a difficult message to accept because for lots of us and certainly for the Sanhedrin there it requires us to admit that so far we've got it wrong about Jesus.

[17 : 50] Maybe to admit that people we know have got it wrong about Jesus. My verdict on Jesus has been wrong. I see now that he is alive that he came to save me that he died for me.

I'm going to put my trust in him. It takes humility to admit that ourselves to accept that Jesus rose he is king and that he loves us and wants to save us.

But we have to do that because it's the only way to be saved. No other religion can save us because we can't do enough. And I wonder if in a gathering it would be different for different people and different gatherings but in a gathering like this whether for a number of us this morning we don't actually find it that hard to accept that Muslims need saving or that Hindus need saving because we've seen enough of those religions and other religions to see that we can't all be right.

They just say the things that they say about God are too different for them all to be paths up the same mountain. It just doesn't make sense. But what we find harder is to look at our secular together successful wealthy maids and believe that they need to be saved.

That they are desperately in need of a saviour. Now when I think about guys I know in Glasgow is the temptation for me to see their home comforts their financial security their holidays their social lives their popularity their apparently flourishing children and think they don't need Jesus.

[19 : 30] Because if I feel like that I'm not going to cross the pain barrier and mention Jesus. I'll keep quiet and think well if I don't mention Jesus I'm okay and they're okay and everyone's okay.

Okay? But we see here these fishermen Peter and well Peter here he's got all the religious power of the temple stacked up against him and he keeps going because he can ask himself did Jesus rise from the dead?

Yes he did. You killed him God raised him we saw him and if he rose from the dead that means he is the only way that anybody can be saved.

And the people around Peter in that day just as the people around us today who don't acknowledge Jesus as king are on a collision course with him. They're living out of line with the central truth of our universe.

no matter how together their lives look no matter how flourishing they seem to be they're out of line with the central truth of our universe Jesus is in charge and they must call on his name and be saved.

[20 : 38] So if you're here today and you've never done that would you be willing to do that? Is God prompting you with this narrative these events to acknowledge that God did raise Jesus and to ask him to save you?

That's what Peter invites the people to do he urges them to do but it's what Peter believes that keeps him going in the face of opposition. The next way that the church keeps going in proclaiming Jesus is through what they pray so our next point the church prays an unexpected prayer.

Peter and John go back to their people to the church and they pray together. Now how would you pray after being put in prison overnight for speaking about Jesus and then threatened?

What we're expecting is a prayer for persecution to stop. We're expecting a prayer for protection for safety that they wouldn't be arrested again.

That would be natural but the prayer culminates in verse 29 have a look verse 29 now Lord consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

[21 : 54] How do they get there? The prayer is a great model for us of a healthy prayer life. From verses 24 to 28 the disciples are praying but they're praying through God's word.

They're really as they pray they're asking themselves how do we look at what we're going through and how do we look at who God is through the lens of God's word. If they'd had an experience based theology they might have thought that was hard wasn't it?

Crikey. This opposition has risen up speaking about Jesus just doesn't feel good anymore it doesn't feel right at all. it's causing division let's go quiet. But instead they go back to scripture to the Bible and as they see things in light of God's word they pray to God and they say you made you spoke you decided you made is in verse 24.

Verse 24 they raise their voices together in prayer to God and they address him sovereign Lord you made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. it's a powerful prayer isn't it?

When you experience something in your life that makes you doubt that God is in charge and you turn to him in prayer praise him that he made everything you made.

[23 : 15] Then it's God spoke so they go to an Old Testament song Psalm 2 written by David in verse 25 why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain the kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one or his Messiah they realize as they turn to the word that God told them this would happen.

This psalm is foretelling how Jesus would be treated what confidence it would give them to see none of this is actually taking God by surprise.

And then they say you decided to God verse 28 you decided verse 28 they Pilate and Herod Israel and the Romans they did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

So folks what a great prayer to pray when Jesus is being opposed God you made the opposition seems powerful and scary but God made the land and the sea and space and everything in them God you spoke the opposition has taken us by surprise we feel upset we feel hurt we feel injustice we're worried we're scared but it's exactly what you told us would happen by your Holy Spirit through the Bible and God you decided even the cross of Jesus the worst act of evil in history was only happened because God decided it should happen and he used it for salvation so we can trust him I don't know what you think about that but I think this is a great model for us for our prayer lives and not just when we're praying about persecution when we experience any kind of challenge in life it's great isn't it here the church remembers to pray it's the first thing they do and they do it together they admit their own weakness they're saying to God we can't do this on our own please give us the boldness we need to do what you're calling us to do and keep speaking of

Jesus and they turn to the Bible so that they can see their experience through the lens of God's word how long does it take you to change your view of God and his character in light of something you experience how long does it take you for me I can do that in seconds at least within minutes something happens to me I have a setback or I feel guilty about my own sin what does it make me

think about God and his character but the church here in Acts 4 they do what I need to do they turn to God's word so that as they pray about the issue they're bringing God's words back to him and they've got a view of God shaped by who he says he is not by their experience and they see God hasn't lost control here he said it would happen and he can take even the worst evil and bring good out of it so that's their unexpected prayer verse 29 enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness and then they pray that God would act alongside that to attest to the truth of the message verse 30 stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant

[26 : 39] Jesus and that's what we'll see in the coming chapters as God answers that prayer and they speak of Jesus and God does through the apostles works that confirm the truth of the message and the outcome of all that is our final point this morning God gives an unexpected response have a look at verse 31 after they prayed the place where they were meeting was shaken and they were all filled with the holy spirit and spoke the word of God boldly the house rocked they get this moment that looks a bit like God coming down at Mount Sinai when God's people were led by Moses they were brought to the mountain there was an earthquake as God's presence came down here is this house church away from the temple people in exile praying and God is saying these are my people now the community of believers in Jesus

Christ this is the new Israel I am with them now why is it unexpected for us today that this happened and the way it happened I think a couple of things to notice we might find this unexpected because the believers here are being filled with the Holy Spirit but they're already believers so surely they already have the Holy Spirit living in them every believer has the Holy Spirit do we have in our own spiritual lives a place for us as Christians who have the Holy Spirit to look to be filled with the Holy Spirit and another reason we might find this unexpected is that the fresh filling of the Holy Spirit that happens to the believers here comes so that they can face the great challenge to speak about Jesus with boldness in the face of opposition so that the result is that the Spirit empowers God's people not just the apostles the whole church to speak the word of God boldly so maybe it's worth asking are you somebody who yearns for a deeper experience of the Spirit in your life if not why not and if you do yearn for that if you want more of the Spirit could you go and tell somebody about Jesus cross the pain barrier praying that God would give you boldness because you know I couldn't go and tell that person about Jesus or those people about Jesus in my own strength the only way I'm going to be able to do that is if God's Spirit fills me afresh so that I can do it so you pray dependently and you go and do it that's how these believers experience the Holy Spirit so folks we have an unfinished task Acts has 28 chapters and we live in

Acts chapter 29 until Jesus comes in glory we're in the ongoing story of God's saving unstoppable word going out to the nations about Jesus and when we see the boldness of the early church here maybe it makes us ask ourselves will I speak about Jesus to people I know will I do that this week and if we feel deeply reluctant to do that if we feel that we're not convinced that we could do that that we should do that when we feel afraid of the opposition should we do that how do we cross the pain barrier well we need to feel the reality of what Peter knew and believed about Jesus there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we can be saved so we must keep speaking of him do you believe that is that what you think that he is alive and it's the only name by which we can be saved we need to pray these kind of prayers for boldness to a

God who made everything who was spoken and who was in control and we need the confidence that the Holy Spirit stands ready to equip us and strengthen us for the task let's pray together our father we thank you that Jesus is alive that you raised him and they saw him and that by his name we can be saved whoever we are and whatever we've done as we call on his name strengthen us we pray in the power of your spirit to be your witnesses with the people we meet this week and to the ends of the earth in Jesus name we ask amen