

CCH sermon 5th July 2020 Acts 4:1-31
“The non-lockdown gospel”

v20.

I'd like to start with a question. How do you find it talking about Jesus?

- Do you find it really easy to talk about Him?
- And do you find millions of people queuing up to thank you for doing so?
- or do you find...
 - frostiness from your family
 - coldness from your colleagues
 - even disagreements with other disciples about how to do it?
- I think we all find it really hard speaking about Jesus.
- And since life is already complicated enough as it is at the moment in this crisis, can't we put sharing our faith on hold at the moment along with everything else?

Acts 4 shows us why we have to keep talking about Jesus, even when we face opposition. I've called it the “non-lockdown gospel!”

- In acts so far, we've seen Jesus ascend, the Spirit descend, and the church go forward in bold evangelism, including last week (with Dan) Peter healing a lame beggar and boldly preaching the gospel to the people gathered in the temple.
- But the next episodes show opposition to the gospel.
- We'll look at this great story, and we'll draw out three lessons why the apostles couldn't help speaking about Jesus, and why we must keep talking about Jesus despite opposition.
- Three things that all have to do with God. Father, Son, Spirit.
- I've called it the lockdown gospel, because the good news of Jesus can't be put into lockdown!

The story is in 3 scenes, Let's start with the first (v1-4) ARREST.

- It must have been pretty scary. Peter is preaching, and then these three groups start to crowd in at the back. v1.
 - Priests- who carried out the main functions in the Temple.
 - The captain of the guard- NO2 most important person in the Temple and like the chief security officer.

- The Sadducees- a group of Jews who didn't believe in any life after death. Well they would have been thrilled with Peter's message of Resurrection in Jesus. v2.
- So they do what any grouping does to clamp down on free speech, they arrest the ringleaders. v3.
- But you can lockdown the messengers, but you can't lockdown the gospel, and another 2000 people became Christians that day. v4.
- Do you know I discovered reading about Belgium that the places where Bible believers were historically killed for their faith was often the places that the church grew the most! The gospel can't be locked down.
- And in each of these scenes we see **negative** gospel opposition, yet **positive** gospel witness.

Scene #2. (v5-21) INTERROGATION (we'll come onto lesson 1 in a mo, first story!)

- The next day... Now this is pretty scary.
- The official body that gathers for the “trial” if we can put it like that is the same Sanhedrin that sent Jesus to death (including key leaders like Caiaphas).
- How would you be feeling now?
- But Peter doesn't seem phased.
 - Question v7
 - Answer v8-11.
- Don't you love it?
 - This is Peter who a few weeks ago had denied his Lord three times covering up that he even knew Jesus.
 - What explains the transformation?
- Well the answer is our first lesson today.
- **THE SPIRIT'S POWER.**
 - Look again at v8 Filled with the Holy Spirit.
 - What else could explain this turnaround.
 - Surely Peter hadn't found the power in himself?
 - God the Holy Spirit had come down and had empowered the early church to proclaim the gospel, just like he'd promised.
 - “You will receive power when the HS comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the Ends of the earth”.

- And you see (as we looked at in our seminar on Wednesday night) the same Holy Spirit is in us if we are followers of Jesus.
- And he equips us to proclaim Jesus.
- The Spotlight loves to highlight Jesus, and if you have the Holy Spirit inside you, then he will give you strength (even if you don't want it!) to speak about Jesus.
 - Ever feel a bit wobbly.
 - Ever feel a bit scared to open your mouth and say the word Jesus?
 - Hesitating on hitting send for that invitation to our Sunday night discussions?
 - Feeling too scared, too wobbly, too weak?
 - Remember the Power of the Holy Spirit.
- Throughout this passage, and throughout Acts we see the Holy Spirit giving strength to people to speak even when it's painful.
- 120 years after this an old Christian leader called Polycarp was told to renounce his faith burn incense to the divine Roman emperor or be killed. Polycarp said this. *"Eighty and Six years I have served him, and he he has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King and Saviour"*.
- The Holy Spirit helped him to speak, and he will help us to speak even when it is hard.

Another reason why we HAVE To speak is in v12.

- Like every passage in Acts, this section is just brimming with Jesus.
- And this is another lesson for why we they and we can't keep the good news locked down.
 - We could look at Jesus the life giver in v2 "proclaiming the resurrection of the dead"
 - We could look at Jesus the cornerstone in v11
 - Or Jesus the anointed one of Acts 2 in v27
- Maybe you can meditate on these wonderful truths later.
- But look at v12 for now.
- **THE SON'S UNIQUENESS**
 - v12.
 - Do you see that Peter is absolutely convinced that Jesus is the only way to be rescued? Let's slow down on the teaching of this verse....

- The gospel is narrow:
 - NO-ONE ELSE
 - NO OTHER NAME.
 - (Not buddha, krisna, Muhammed,
 - God has not provided salvation through any other means. Only Jesus. He is the only cure.
- The gospel is specific:
 - You have to hear about the NAME of Jesus.
 - There's no way in the back door outside him!
 - I can't go along with the argument that God saves Hindus or Muslims by Jesus without them knowing it.
 - We must tell people about Jesus. His precise identity.
 - no other NAME.
- And the gospel is urgent:
 - Must be saved
- But the gospel is wonderfully inclusive:
 - given to mankind.
 - Anyone can be rescued back to God through Jesus, and only through Jesus. But anyone, no matter who they are, no matter what they have done, can be made right with God as they put their trust in Him.
- Peter was convinced about this, and this is why he preached Jesus Christ as the only way to God.
- And so must we...
 - Imagine you are a scientist working in a lab (for some of you that's not imagination, you do that as a day job)!
 - And you discover a cure for Coronavirus.
 - But it's the only cure in the whole world.
 - What would you do?
 - Well surely if you love people, and you want to stop them dying, you would spread the word and have the vaccine shared far and wide.

- Well we are in a pandemic called sin.
- It is a killer.
- It takes people to hell.
- Because we have all fallen short of the Glory of God. We have all acted selfishly and sinfully, in rebellion against God and his 10 commandments.
- No amount of being nice, being generous, being will ever get us to heaven- that's like putting a plaster on a Covid case.
- But God has a cure. A vaccine.
- It will take you from hell to heaven.
- And it's a free gift- you just need to ask!
- And it's not a process or a programme. **It's a person! JESUS!**

- v12- The Son's uniqueness.

- How tragic to read from a local minister in his newsletter to all the parish (that some of you live in), of this quote...
- *"I might wake up tomorrow and find that God has called me to become a Hindu. It hasn't happened yet, and I don't think it ever will but it could. Until it does, I continue as a Christian"*
- That is not Christianity.
- I've talked personally to that minister and explained why I can't partner with him in outreach. I don't think we share the same gospel.
- v12

- If you get that humanity is dying
- And that Jesus is the only way, are you going to keep quiet about him?
- are you going to "preach the gospel and use words if you must"
- Are you going to be nice and just
- Or are you going to SPEAK.
- Just pause on that.

- Look at Jesus in this passage.
- WE NEED TO SPEAK TO OURSELVES ABOUT JESUS....
- I fear too many of us have got rather discouraged in recent weeks. Like those sunflowers in the darkness, we have let our heads droop. No wonder. Life has been at best boring, and at worst devastating.
- But Lift your eyes to the Son. Not S_U_N, but S_O_N.

- Jesus the wonderful Saviour.
- He loves you.
- He has saved you. That's a lifeboat word! You are sailing to safety now.
- Look at him.
- *Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.*

- WE NEED TO SPEAK TO OTHERS ABOUT JESUS...

- Is he not wonderful.
- Is he not urgent.
- Is he not essential?
- Is he not life giving.
- He is the only lifeboat on the sinking ship. Now if you love people will you not tell people about him?
 - Yes they may blank you.
 - They may roll their eyes.
 - They may call you names
- They may even arrest you, like they did Peter, or kill you like Stephen in a few chapters (or Polycarp). But is that a reason to keep quiet? v12.
- We don't have time to do more than read the rest of scene 2 v18-20
- Wonderfully they are released v21. The leaders can't do anything else!
- An amazing "act of kindness" (v9) has happened.

Well Scene 3 is a prayer meeting.

- The early church never stop praying.
- And Peter gives them a blow by blow report. v23-24
- And they pray.
- I love this prayer, we'll spend more time on it at our prayer meeting on Wednesday. v24.
- They remember Psalm 2.
- We looked at it a few weeks ago, in our Psalms of Refuge.
- And the Scriptures, as they so often do, help them to see clearly.
- It's why we must preach the Scriptures.

- Psalm 2 tells them what's going on.
- God has predicted that the leaders of the world will reject the Messiah.
- And v27, that's Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the Gentiles.
- Is everything out of control when we face opposition?
- No.... It's part of the Father's plan, as revealed in Scripture .
- God uses suffering in his plans.
 - Suffering for Jesus.
 - Suffering for Jesus' people
- God has
- So the church prays.
 - What for?
 - To have an easy life?
 - For more money in the kitty?
 - For God to take these opponents away?
- They don't even pray for protection.
- They pray to keep talking about Jesus despite opposition. And for God to accredit his word.
- And I love v31. It's as if the very creation itself wants to add its "amen"
- And what do they do?
- Call it a day, have a cup of tea.
- Give evangelism a break for a while so that they can regroup, or teach the 5000 new converts?
- "Filled with the Spirit" - there's lesson 1 again.
- THEY SPOKE THE WORD OF GOD BOLDLY.
- They opened their mouth and spoke about Jesus.
- And that's what we are going to do this week.
- We are going to pray to speak about Jesus.
- And we're not going to keep our mouths shut
 - in those conversations on the phone with our parents
 - in these online messages to our friends
 - in those putting out your bin moments with our neighbours

- How can we keep quiet about Jesus?
 1. The Spirit's power will help us to talk about him.
 2. The very message itself will compel us to share of the only lifeboat.
 3. And we will remember that God's plan revealed in the Scriptures is for suffering and salvation in his Anointed Messiah King Jesus.
- **Can I finish with a story. It's the story about Jack.**
- This story is told by Mez McConnel, working on housing estates (or schemes as they are known) in Glasgow.
 - Jack was a drug user and a drug dealer.
 - He was unfaithful to his partner and a bad dad.
 - And he was loud aggressive and opposed to almost everything about God and the Bible
 - He came to services stoned, shouting and questioning everything from the pulpit, disrupting practically every meeting.
 - The church prayed for him.
 - The church loved him.
 - The church took him to appointments and fed him.
 - The church listened to his sad stories
 - The church opened the Bible with him and answered his questions.
 - And then Jack wasn't seen for months.
 - Until one Sunday Jack walked into the building and declared that he wanted to give his life to Christ.
 - His life started to change
 - His friends started to change.
 - His partner became a Christian
 - Within 6 months of his conversion he was baptised and then married in front of his kids and his unbelieving family.
 - Mez says "There's still a long way to go, but he's moving in the right direction".
- Are you going to stay silent about Jesus this week?
- Are you going to pack in evangelism at the first sign of opposition?
- Are you going to withhold the news of the only lifeboat from those you love? Let's pray.