

SHAKING THINGS UP

SERIES: SENT: LIVING THE MISSION
OF THE CHURCH.



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Acts 3-4
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Acts 3:1-4:31

Jesus sends us into the world. As he does so, what do we encounter? On the one hand, we encounter a hurting world. On the other hand, we encounter a skeptical world. Much of the world is in a world of hurt, but most people don't believe that he can help the world much. In fact, many people today believe that followers of Jesus are hurting the world more than they're helping it.

Here's the view of one person: "The reason the world hates Christians is because they behave badly, they're rude, boorish, arrogant, conceited, full of themselves, ignorant, and judgmental."¹

So, what do we do? In Acts 3-4, Peter and John interact with a hurting, skeptical, and antagonistic world. They show us the way.

Peter and John, by the way, disobey governing authorities who order them to stop speaking about Jesus. Elsewhere, however, both Peter and Paul command believers to be in submission to governing authorities (1 Peter 2:13-17, Romans 13:1-17). Clearly, submission doesn't equate to unqualified obedience. If governing authorities command Peter to stop speaking about Jesus, he will disobey those authorities. Peter and John's interaction with authorities will give us a launching-off point to next week as we consider, on the eve of the election, the intersection of faith and politics.

Exceeding Expectations

Acts 3:1-10:

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. 3 Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. 4 And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." 5 And he fixed his attention on them, expecting

to receive something from them. 6 But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" 7 And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. 8 And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God, 10 and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Instead of averting his gaze from a beggar, Peter directs his gaze at him. The lame man asks for, and then expects, money, but Peter gives him much more than what he asked for or expected. Peter does what Jesus did: he heals a lame man who was being carried by others (Luke 5:17-26). However, Jesus didn't appeal to any name in order to heal the man who was brought to him. Peter, on the other hand, appeals to the name of Jesus. Peter doesn't heal the man; Jesus heals the man.

The healing of the lame man signals that the long-expected new age has arrived (Isaiah 35, Luke 7:22). The lame man would have been prohibited from entering the temple, but now he enters the temple with Peter and John (Leviticus 21:17-20). The man is not only restored to community, he also joins the new worshiping community that is following Jesus, and he praises God as he does so. What Peter does to the man affects more than just the man, for those who recognize him are "filled with wonder and amazement."

Heal in the name of Jesus

The world is in a world of hurt. Will we avert our gaze from those in pain, or will we direct our gaze at them, at least at some of them, or maybe just at one of them, the way that Peter directed his gaze at the lame man? Like Peter, we have been commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ to bring his the healing love to the world.

For sure, Jesus, as the resurrected Lord of the world, can and still does heal people physically, in anticipation of the day when he will bring complete healing to all those who welcome his rule. For sure, believers in Jesus can and should pray that he would heal people. If there are some who on occasion are filled with the Spirit in such a way that they have confidence that Jesus will heal a particular person at a particular time, they might even command a lame person to rise up and walk in the name of Jesus.

However, there are many other ways to heal in the name of Jesus. We bring the healing love of Jesus to schools through our Beautiful Day work projects. We bring the healing love of Jesus to our neighborhoods by getting to know our neighbors and inviting them over to our homes. We bring the healing love of Jesus to East Palo Alto with our upcoming Harvest Festival. We bring the healing love of Jesus to India by sending medical and teaching teams to that country. We bring the healing love of Jesus to the world by partnering with International Justice Mission, which is committed to rescuing the oppressed and seeing perpetrators punished.

Healing in the name of Jesus often creates opportunities to speak of the name of Jesus, as it created an opportunity for Peter.

Witnesses of the resurrection

Acts 3:11-16:

While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. 12 And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? 13 The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. 14 But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. 16 And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

Peter rebukes the people for being astounded. If they had been paying attention not only to recent events but also to their history as a people, they should have expected the coming of the new age and seen its arrival in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Peter is quick to deny any credit for healing the man. When he healed the man, he did so in the name of Jesus, and when he explains the healing to the people, he tells them that God has glorified Jesus by raising him from the dead.

Although Peter is quick to deny credit, he is also quick to assign blame: he not only accuses the people of delivering over and denying God's servant, the Holy and Righteous One, he also accuses them of killing the Author of Life. He not only accuses them of killing the Author of Life, he also accuses them of preferring a murderer. When the Jewish leaders handed Jesus over to the Roman authorities to be crucified, Pilate, the Roman governor, decided to release Jesus, but the leaders persuaded the crowd to instead ask for the release of Barabbas, an insurrectionist. Peter shows the people that their sins have gone from bad to worse.

The people rendered their verdict against Jesus, but God overturned their verdict by raising him from the dead. While Peter and John are "witnesses" of the resurrection of Jesus (they saw him alive from the dead), the evidence for the resurrection is the healing of the lame man.

Times of refreshing

Acts 3:17-26:

"And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. 18 But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. 19 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. 22 Moses said, "The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. 23 And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people." 24 And all the prophets who have spoken, from

Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. 25 You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ 26 God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.”

Although the people are guilty of the most grievous of sins, not only of killing the Messiah but also of preferring a murderer to the Messiah, Peter allows that they acted in ignorance: they didn’t know they were killing the Messiah (Luke 23:34). On the other hand, the Scriptures, going back to the stories of Abraham and Moses and all the way through the prophetic writings, spoke of the coming of the Messiah—and spoke in such a way that Jesus of Nazareth is recognizable as the Messiah. So where does that leave the people—eternally guilty of killing the Messiah?

Not if they repent and turn back. Currently, they’re on a path that leads to destruction. If they persist in their “wickedness,” they will be “destroyed from the people”—excluded from the people of God. Therefore, they need to do two things: they need to turn around, and they need to walk in the opposite direction.

In what sense are these people wicked? Their wickedness is seen, primarily, in their decision to kill Jesus, the Messiah. Which raises the question, why did they kill him? Some killed Jesus because he wasn’t a nationalist. Others killed Jesus because he upset the status quo. Still others, especially those in the crowd who cried for his crucifixion, killed him because he was a colossal disappointment, a would-be Messiah who couldn’t even convince or overthrow the Jewish leaders.

If the people turn around and turn back to God, believing in Jesus, their sins, including and especially the sin of killing the Messiah, will be blotted out. It will be as if they had never walked down this awful path in the first place, as if they had never cried out for the blood of Jesus. The Lord will not only blot out their sins, he will also send, from his very presence, “times of refreshing” in which they will experience his love and be renewed as his people, in advance of the return of Christ and the restoration of all things, the advent of the new creation.

Speak of the name of Jesus

God raised Jesus from the dead. Like Peter and the apostles, we who believe in Jesus are witnesses of the resurrection. We haven’t actually seen him, though some of us have been given visions of him. We believe he’s alive from the dead because of what we have experienced of him, because of what he has done for us, because of how he has revealed his love to us. As Peter will go on to say, we “speak of what we have seen and heard.”

Most of the people we meet are not witnesses of the resurrection, however: they have not yet experienced Jesus, at least as far as they can tell. How are they going to come to believe the Gospel? Indeed, we are witnesses of the resurrection, and we can and should therefore speak of the resurrection, but the evidence for the resurrection is not the words we speak but the healing Jesus brings. Peter, when speaking of the resurrection, says as much: he tells the onlookers that “the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.” The way to prove to people that Jesus has risen from the dead is to heal people in the name of Jesus.

Scholar N.T. Wright observes:

The work of creating a just and peaceful human community is therefore the context in which the verbal message about Jesus can properly be spoken and heard. When the church is being for the world what Jesus was for Israel—welcoming the outcast, healing the sick, challenging the powers that oppress and enslave the poor—then its claim about Jesus will be self-authenticating.²

The church must heal in the name of Jesus and speak of the name of Jesus. Some will be more inclined to healing, and others will be more inclined to speaking (although Peter both heals and speaks on Acts 3-4). This is as it should be, because we have “gifts that differ according to the grace given us” (Romans 12:6). We need each other: we need the whole body of Christ to embody the whole Gospel, which includes word and deed.

When we (PBC) go to India, we take both a medical team and a teaching team: healers and speakers. We don’t need to do it this way. We could send the teams separately, at separate times to separate places. But to me, the unity of the two teams is a powerful reminder that the mission of the church is to both speak of the name of Jesus and heal in the name of Jesus. I go to teach pastors and evangelists. The doctors and nurses set up clinics in slums. As a speaker, I love getting on the plane with healers.

To help us speak of the name of Jesus, we've invited an evangelist, Matt Mikalatos to both preach and lead an evangelism seminar on Sunday, November 6.

If you speak about Jesus, though, not everyone is going to be pleased. Peter and John managed to annoy some powerful people.

Threatening the status quo

Acts 4:1-4:

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. 4 But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

Peter and John have come to the attention of certain Jewish leaders—priests, the captain of the temple, and Sadducees—who by and large collaborated with Roman rule and therefore favored the status quo. First, Jesus disturbed the status quo. Now his followers disturb the status quo. “What, he still has followers?” they must be thinking. “Didn’t we kill that deceiver?”

Peter and John are preaching the resurrection of the dead—not only the resurrection of Jesus but also the future resurrection of the people of God. Some Jews, nationalist such as the Pharisees, believe in the future resurrection of the people of God. Other Jews, collaborators such as the Sadducees, don’t believe in the future resurrection of the people of God. No one, however, believed in a one-off resurrection of an individual in advance of the future resurrection of the people of God.

That Peter and John preached the resurrection of both Jesus and the people of God would have been particularly threatening to those Jews—priests, the captain of the temple, Sadducees—who enjoyed some measure of power under Roman rule. Those who believe that they will be resurrected, and have reason to believe they will be resurrected because they’re convinced that their leader has already risen from the dead, tend to challenge the status quo because they’re not afraid of the threat of death.

Therefore, the Jewish leaders arrest Peter and John until they can figure out what do about them. But they can’t arrest the Gospel: the number of believers grows to five thousand.

Speaking truth to power

Acts 4:5-12:

On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, 6 with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, 9 if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. 11 This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

First, the healing of the lame man created the opportunity for Peter to preach to the people about Jesus. Second, the healing creates the opportunity for Peter, filled and therefore empowered by the Holy Spirit, to preach to the leaders.

Peter unveils the leaders’ hypocrisy. Shouldn’t leaders want what’s best for their people? Shouldn’t they sanction a “good deed done to a crippled man”—a deed so good, in fact, that it heals the man? Yet instead of applauding those who did the good deed, the leaders see fit to examine them.

Peter’s message to the leaders echoes his message to the people: he accuses them of crucifying Jesus, he claims that God has vindicated Jesus by raising him from the dead, he presents the healed man as evidence that Jesus is alive from the dead, and he enlists the support of the Scriptures. In this case, Peter cites Psalm 118:22 to demonstrate that Jesus, rejected by the leaders, has become “the cornerstone” of a new temple—in this case, a temple composed of people, not stones—which

wouldn't make the leaders, who oversee the current temple, any more secure. Peter had told the people that they must repent and turn back. He employs different language but tells the leaders the same thing: "there is salvation in one else."

Astonished by boldness

Acts 4:13-22:

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. 14 But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. 15 But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, 16 saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17 But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name." 18 So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." 21 And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. 22 For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old.

The boldness of Peter and John to speak out, apart from the customary training, astonishes the leaders. But just as the people shouldn't have been astounded by the healing of the lame man, the leaders shouldn't have been astonished by the boldness of the apostles, which comes from having been with Jesus. In fact, the leaders recognize Peter and John as having been with Jesus. When the people "recognized" the healed man, they were "filled with wonder and amazement" and "utterly astounded." Likewise, the Jewish leaders recognize that Peter and John have been with Jesus, and they are "astonished." By the time Peter was finished preaching to the people, the number of believers in Jesus had climbed to five thousand. Will the leaders be added to the number?

They have "nothing to say in opposition." They acknowledge that "a notable sign has been performed" and that they "cannot deny it." They ask, "What shall we do with these men?" But they don't ask, "What shall we do with Jesus?" Instead of reading the sign and considering the possibility that God raised Jesus from the dead, they order Peter and John to stop telling people about Jesus.

Peter and John refuse, claiming that the leaders are commanding them to stop doing what God has commanded them to do. First, Peter artistically rebuked the leaders for putting John and him on trial for "a good deed done to a crippled men." Now, Peter and John artistically rebuke the leaders, who are judges, to "judge" whether it is "right" to obey them rather than God. For Peter and John, the choice is obvious: they cannot do other than speak of what they have "seen and heard" about Jesus.

The leaders, afraid of losing face and fearing a popular uprising, release Peter and John.

What are we afraid of?

Jesus is a threat to the status quo today just as he was in Peter's day. If God raised him from the dead, then everyone must answer to him. Many people don't want to answer to him—or to anyone else, for that matter. They don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus not only because they don't think it's true, but also because they don't want it to be true. Peter and John were bold: they spoke about Jesus even if it meant being arrested by those who preferred the status quo. Are we likewise bold? If not, what are we afraid of?

In this part of the world, we don't risk being confined in a jail for speaking about Jesus, but we do risk being confined in a category. We know that if we speak to others about Jesus, they may assign us to some preconceived category reserved for nut cases, bigots, and reactionaries. No one likes being labeled. Moreover, for some, being labeled as an evangelical means that certain doors may close in your face.

For example, according to one survey, fifty-nine percent of anthropologists and fifty-three percent of English professors in this country said they would be less likely to hire an evangelical. George Yancey, a sociologist who is black, says, "Outside of academia I faced more problems as a black. But inside academia I face more problems as a Christian, and it is not even close."³

What, then, should we do if we're afraid to speak of the name of Jesus?

What to pray for

Acts 4:23-31:

When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, 25 who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

**"Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?**

**26 The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed'—**

27 for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. 29 And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, 30 while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

The other believers, upon hearing the report from Peter and John, turn to the Scriptures, just as Peter did when speaking to the people and to the leaders. In citing Psalm 2, the believers understand that the Messiah was destined, even predestined by God, to be rejected, and they not so subtly equate Jews who rejected Jesus with Gentiles. As Peter and John preached about Jesus, some continued to rage, plot in vain, and gather together not so much now against Jesus but against his followers.

How, therefore, do the believers pray? They don't pray for protection. They don't pray that God would convert or thwart the leaders. They don't pray for revival.

Taking note of the threat of Jewish leaders, they pray for boldness: "grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness." They also pray that God would heal people, as he healed the lame man, but the wording of their prayer suggests that they expect such healings to continue, along with signs and wonders. What they need most is boldness.

God approved of their prayer: he shook the place where they were gathered. He answered their prayer: they continued to speak about Jesus with boldness.

What should we do if we're afraid to speak about Jesus? Pray for boldness. Let's not take a guilt trip because we're not bold. Maybe we shouldn't worry about trying to be bold. Instead, let's pray for boldness and see if the Sovereign Lord shakes us up a bit. All the while, let's continue to be sensitive to the opportunities the Lord creates for us to be involved with bringing the healing love of Jesus to the world, for the evidence for the resurrection is not the words we speak but the healing Jesus brings.

Fill 'er up

Nicholas Kristof, a columnist for the *New York Times*, says he has "very little in common, politically or theologically, with evangelicals," and he deems himself "not particularly religious."⁴ If the onlookers in Jerusalem were "filled with wonder and amazement" when Jesus, through Peter, healed a lame man, and if the Jewish leaders were "astonished" by the boldness of Peter and John, Kristof reports being "truly awed" by followers of Jesus whom he has seen in so many remote places, "combating illiteracy and warlords, famine and disease, humbly struggling to do the Lord's work as they see it . . ." ⁵

I take it that Kristof doesn't believe in the resurrection, but when we heal people in the name of Jesus, he, like the Jewish leaders, has nothing to say in opposition. In fact, he has much to say in our favor. Healing people in the name of Jesus serves as a "notable sign" that is difficult to deny. This is what Kristof wrote in an August column:

In Georgia, an India-born Muslim named Malik Waliyani bought a gas station and convenience store a few months ago and was horrified when it was recently burglarized and damaged. He struggled to keep it going. But then the nearby Smoke Rise Baptist Church heard what had happened.

"Let's shower our neighbor with love," Chris George, the pastor, told his congregation at the end of his sermon,

and more than 200 members drove over to assist, mostly by making purchases. One man drove his car around until the gas tank was empty, so he could buy more gas.

“Our faith inspires us to build bridges, not to label people as us and them, but to recognize that we’re all part of the same family,” the pastor told me. “Our world is a stronger place when we choose to look past labels and embrace others with love.”

This is a wrenching, divisive, polarizing time in America, and we have a major party nominee who is sowing hatred and perhaps violence. Let’s not succumb. Good people, like the members of Smoke Rise Baptist, are reweaving our nation’s social fabric even as it is being torn. ⁶

Let’s do cool stuff like that, and may times of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord.

Endnotes

¹ Rainer, Thomas S. director. *What do Non-Christians Really Think of Us*. tomrainer.com. 15 June 2013.

² Wright, N.T.. *Bringing the Church to the World*. Bethany House Publishers, 1992. 173.

³ Kristof, Nicholas. *A Confession of Liberal Intolerance*. New York Times. 8 May 2016. SR1.

⁴ Kristof, Nicholas. *Evangelicals Without Blowhards*. New York Times. 31 July 2011. SR10; *A Little Respect for Dr. Foster*. New York Times. 28 March 2015. SR9.

⁵ Kristof, Nicholas. *A Little Respect for Dr. Foster*. New York Times. 28 March 2015. SR9.

⁶ Kristoff, Nicholas. *Trump is Making America Meaner*. New York Times. 13 August 2016. SR1.