

Why Should We Listen?

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[0 : 00] Well, folks, great to see you this morning. It's my first time actually back in the building since we've been allowed just a few more people. So it is great to see more of you here.

And just for the place to feel a bit back to what it was before. Can you remember those days when we used to all pack in here and meet? It was great. And we should be so thankful to God for his common grace to us as a country that this is even possible.

So let's not lose sight of that. And let's just grab the privilege of both horns and let's turn to God's word this morning. Acts chapter 3. I want you to come there with me if you've got your Bibles. We're just going to dive straight into this wonderful passage as we continue on in our series in the book of Acts. Now, you up for a few fun facts as we begin? Yeah?

A couple of fun facts for you to do with listening. Okay? Apparently the average person in the UK, not calling any of you average, but the average person in the UK has 27 conversations a day.

[0 : 58] Thought it was quite interesting this week when I learned it. Maybe you can think about it in your own life. Is that true? 27 conversations. Off the back of that, here's the one I found even more interesting.

Apparently, in each of those conversations, within the first eight seconds, we have decided whether we're going to listen or not. Quite interesting, isn't it?

Glad we're not doing tea and coffee after the service today. Could be a little awkward to check if you're listening. But eight seconds is what we're willing to give it, apparently. Which is shocking when you think about it. Our attention span these days is eight seconds.

If you're in need of a humbling this morning, know that a goldfish has one of nine. But eight seconds, apparently, is all we're willing to give it. Now, what do they say is always true about observational humour?

Why is it funny? It's funny because it's true. Yeah? Funny because it's true. What we need to understand is that I think those facts make a legit point.

[2 : 02] Whether we realise or not, we're walking around asking ourselves subconsciously, why should I listen to you? Why should I listen to you? Seems fitting this week of all weeks, doesn't it? Election week.

Why should I listen to you? The thing for us to see is we're not the first generation who kind of lives our lives according to that maxim. Okay?

I think Luke, as he pens Acts, is well aware that Theophilus and his generation, as they read this book, are asking them that precise question as they come to chapter three.

Particularly at this point in the story of Acts. If you've got it there, flick back to chapter two and kind of refresh yourself as to what we saw a few weeks ago. Okay? What's going on in Acts chapter two?

The gospel has publicly burst onto the scene. Day of Pentecost. Peter preaches. The spirit moves. 3,000 people are converted.

[3 : 01] Okay? That's what the kids today would call scenes, isn't it? What a scene that is. 3,000 people converted. But that was just one day, let's be honest.

Right? One day. I mean, are his, Peter and his message, are they just another one-hit wonder? Right?

Just one day. Are they just another one-hit wonder? World's full of them, isn't it? Gina G, Sinéad O'Connor, crash test dummies, pick your generation. Or is it a classic example of a kind of phase that people react to, one that will come and go, right?

Kind of like flares, if some of you remember those things. And besides, let's be honest, anyone, if they try hard enough, can attract a crowd. Yeah? If you want proof of that, just go to the Royal Mile

festival time in August.

Anyone who stands up and shouts with a few colors, they can draw a crowd to come and listen to what they've got to say. So, why should we listen to Peter?

[4 : 08] Particularly as he says in verse 22 of chapter 3, we've got it there, quoting Moses, listen to him as he tells us, listen to Jesus.

Do you see it? Listen to Jesus. Cracking question. Why should I listen to him? Think in Acts chapter 3, Luke gives us two big reasons why we should listen.

But before we get there, let me just say, whoever you are here today, our souls need this. They need this. If you're not a Christian here today, right, you're going to meet a crowd of people here who have got Jesus wrong.

Right? It's the kind of point of the sermon. You have got him wrong. And they're being called to change their minds as to who Jesus is.

And it's not just kind of outing them that they've done bad stuff. This is an invitation to come and know the God of the Bible. Come and know the blessing of knowing him.

[5 : 23] And you're going to be presented today with a God who is way bigger and way better than I bet that you think he is. And what he's offering you in the person of Jesus is incredible.

Right? Maybe you're a Christian here today. Friends, I want our hearts to be strengthened by this. Because I tell you what I feel like often.

Okay? For Chloe's birthday, she's upstairs, I can say this. For her birthday, we got her a huge, I say we, Alex, we got her a huge helium unicorn balloon.

Right? She loved it. Loved it. But her birthday was at the beginning of March. Right? And one who likes things tidy, I kind of broached the subject as it sits in our house.

Is it time that the balloon went down? Tell you what, I'm never making that mistake again. Okay?

That didn't go down well, which is more than can be said of the balloon.

[6 : 25] But what I've observed as I've watched this balloon in our home is it just gradually, gradually has deflated. Slowly, slowly has leaked.

Once it was banging off the ceiling, now it's just hovering above the floor because it's just leaked, leaked. And how often is that true for us spiritually? We leak the gospel.

Don't we? We just leak the promises. I take our eyes off of Christ. We need a glorious picture of Him to be pulsing through our veins.

The glory of who this God is. Friends, that's why we need Acts chapter 3 in our systems today.

That's why we need to breathe it in in asking that God through His Spirit, the glorious gospel promises that we encounter here.

He would breathe life into our lungs again. So the invitation here is to come and drink this in, come and breathe this in. This is Jesus Christ. So back to our central question, why should I listen to Him?

[7 : 30] Well, here's what Luke does. He gives us two reasons. Firstly, he tells us about the miracle that's solid proof of the future. The miracle that's solid proof of the future.

So here are Peter and John verse 1, if you come to the text, verse 1. See where they're going? Off to the temple to pray. Love that they're still being obedient at this point in the story.

Off to the temple to pray. And they encounter a man. Now notice the details. None of this is wasted. Notice the details about this man. His is a tragic story really when you think about it.

What are we told? He's a man lame from birth. So he's never walked a day in his life. And each day he's taken to the temple precinct by a group of people.

I don't know, maybe these people are in it for the money. That's why they take him there. They get a cut of it. I don't know. But they take him every day to the temple precinct so that he can beg for money. Okay?

[8 : 36] Now I think if this is happening daily, then I think we can assume that he is what we'd call part of the furniture. Right? Part of the furniture. People see him every day.

People know him to say hello to. I mean, you know what it's like. I remember I used to walk from side of town across town to here. Every day you pass the same people on the streets. Every day you know where they sit.

You notice when they're not there. It's kind of what's going on with this man. He's there every day. Part of the furniture. And I'm sure the irony wouldn't have been lost on Theophilus and the original readers that the man, do you see where he's sitting?

The man who's sitting at the beautiful gate has anything other than a beautiful life. But the other irony which they're about to get, we're about to get both barrels, is that the man who can't walk is about to become the subject of the first miracle and acts associated with the gospel that's going to sprint throughout the world.

Looks into irony. Love it. That's what the gospel is going to do. It's going to sprint throughout the world. So Peter and John are passing this man and presumably for no other reason than they have been prompted by the Holy Spirit.

[9 : 48] They stop to speak to him. They've got no money but what they do have is the authority of the risen Christ. Okay?

And they say to the man in verse 6, stand up and walk. And the man, not gradually or partially notice the detail in the text immediately does just that.

It's incredible, isn't it? Incredible that this is happening. What's even more incredible, I found in the story, what does the man do next? I mean, presumably if you think about it, he could have gone up, he could have done a few laps in the temple courts, people's jaws would have hit the ground, he could have posed for a few photos, he could have gone back to begging and he would have made a fortune, would he not?

But there's newfound faith in this man's heart. He understands what has happened, I think. And verse 8, he enters the temple, I bet he's never been in there in his life.

Here is a worshiper, what's he doing? Walking and leaping and praising God. I mean, somebody should really write a kid's song about that, shouldn't they? Walking and leaping and praising God.

[11 : 07] And here's where Luke, I think, brings in the eyewitness details. Come with me, verse 9, all the people saw him. Verse 10, they recognized him, so they're saying to themselves, hey, that's the guy, that's the guy.

We see every day and filled with wondering questions, they kind of testifying to one another that we've never seen anything like this before. So headline, Temple Today, News at 6, Lame Man Walks.

Lame Man Walks. Now, lest we think this is just a nice event, I think there's two big things going on in the background here. Okay, firstly, this is proof of the authority that the risen Jesus has given to his apostles to authenticate them and their message, what they're doing in the eyes of the watching world.

Okay, in other words, this is heaven's stamp of approval on what they are doing and what they are saying. Now, that's important. Okay, I'll tell you why that's important, because their testimony about Jesus is going to be the foundation on which the church is built.

Okay, if you remember last week back to the end of chapter 2, what were the disciples devoting themselves to? Right? What were they devoting themselves to? The apostles' teaching.

[12 : 38] One of the things, right? The apostles' teaching. So, in the years to come, if you're reading Acts, you wonder what this Christianity business is all about. You're thinking about joining a local church. That's a really good fact to know.

When you can't physically see Jesus, right? It's the same for us today. You can trust what the apostles have said about him. Right? We can do that today. We can pick up our Bibles.

We can read what they were saying. Eyewitness details. Bang, we can trust it. Okay? And so, this miracle, in that sense, is solid proof of the future.

Right? But in another sense, here I think we get a wonderful foretaste of God's new creation.

Think back, if you can remember it back, to the reading that Jenny brought us from Isaiah chapter 35. Right? Isaiah's speaking to his generation and he's pleading with them.

[13 : 38] Have you heard it in the language there? Take courage. Take heart. It's a terrible time for the nation. A visual. Take heart. God will visit us. God will save us.

Keep trusting in him. And Isaiah's describing the new creation that God will bring in. What he will do after he's visited his people in the times to come. He's going to bring in this renewed creation.

And he describes what it's going to be like when creation is freed from its bondage and its doing, its glorifying. I was made for this thing. Right?

I think it was C.S. Lewis who described creation at the minute like an orchestra all there with a sheet over the top collecting dust just waiting on its conductor. This is how it's described.

The eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then the lame man shall leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. Does that sound familiar? Right?

[14 : 39] Here is God's kingdom of light through the person work of Christ smashing into the darkness now. Little foretaste that one day it's going to eradicate darkness completely.

Isn't it amazing in light of everything that we've lived through over the last season? And so we can gaze at this man and Peter's words in verse 16 he's in perfect health.

Here is a wee taster wee taster of what it's going to be like in God's new creation for God's people of faith. It's a wonderful picture friends.

You know I've got a friend who's a who used to be a pastor who worked down in London. I remember him telling me a story about being invited by one of his congregation members to come to the one of the very first skyscrapers in Canary Wharf.

Right? It's a very different gig down south I'll tell you that. Okay? But this is what he did. Canary Wharf up he went in the lift top of the skyscraper and he looks out on what is just a huge building site.

[15 : 44] Huge building site. And what he does is he looks to his side and what he notices is a little scale model. Right? I think it was quite a big one actually. A big scale model.

As if to say here is what it's going to look like. Here's the first one. Here's the little taster. But here is what it's going to look like. And let me tell you it's going to be glorious. It's going to be glorious. I think that's what's going on here. You know some of you might be asking and it's a really good question to ask. Right? If this man had faith and was healed does that mean that anyone who has faith God will always heal them?

Right? Let me just say for a minute I think we're best to understand instant miracles like this and Luke's really goes to length to show us that doesn't he? The immediacy of it.

I think they're unique to this time in that they authenticate the apostles at this moment in history which is really important. And I think in that sense we'd be wise to understand that narrative is not always normative.

[16 : 52] You can't just draw a straight line between then and now. But generally speaking can God heal today? Of course God can heal today. Okay? We pray all the time we've been doing over the last season in our prayer meetings for those who are sick in our church family.

Lord, by your grace and your power would they get better? Would you give the doctors the skills that they need to operate, to treat? And never underestimate God's common grace to us through everyday things.

Medicine, right? I was praising God this week had a thumping headache praising him for paracetamol. Right? You can work through these things. It says common grace to us. Can he? Yes. Will he? Friends, in this life he might but he might not. Okay? But regardless here's what I want you to know.

Because of his great fatherly care and love for us in Christ we've got to see here that one day through faith on this day he absolutely will.

[17 : 58] he will. To quote Don Carson who was speaking about how he deals with his own aches and pains and joys and sorrows of life as he grows older he said I often remind myself that I'm not suffering from anything that a good resurrection won't fix.

And I think this is what this is screaming to us and friends I don't want to say that lightly. I know some of us are going through today extremely tough things right?

Extremely tough things. But wouldn't we all take courage in Christ that one day he will come he is the conductor of the orchestra who will come and bring in God's new creation.

These things will be distant memories. And let me just ask friends to some of us all of us do we need to be reminded of this. Okay this is our forever home this is our future.

Remember it's popular in our generation today when we're talking about houses I think because it's so hard to get on the house market people say now that you've got it is that your forever home? No it's not. No it's not.

[19 : 03] Here is our forever home. Friends to some of us need to be reminded of that. Let me ask you who can you be speaking to this week about the truth of that? Okay let me just tell you about one of my favourite moments from sport over the last few years.

I don't know if you remember this the moment in the world triathlon series in Mexico. Alistair Brownlee helping his brother Johnny who's fallen towards the finish line gets under him and helps him towards the finish line keep on going.

It's a great story I loved it. Tell you what so often it feels like the Christian life does it not?

Sometimes we're Alistair sometimes we're Johnny. It's true isn't it?

Friends the question is we need to be a community who is getting alongside one another who's sitting with one another who's listening to one another who's entering into other people's each other's pain who's praying for one another and most importantly is reminding ourselves of the future that is ours because of our king and our God is with us now.

So who can you be playing that role to this week? Bringing this wonderful truth of what God is going to do in the future in Christ bringing it home to each other's lives because this miracle is solid proof of the future and secondly Luke presents us with the voice that stands alone in the present.

[20 : 40] Now back in the text do you see the bewildered crowd wondering what's going on here?

Verse 11 Peter offers them an explanation. He offers them a sermon really but the sermons are always explanations of what's happened.

And the heart of this sermon is that the people and God have different opinions of Jesus. Okay look in the text God verse 13 has glorified his servant Jesus really important for us to see that.

That's what this God has done. This is the resurrection the ascension the glorification is the father's world worldwide declaration of the approval of the work of his son and his affection for his son.

Friends and of course to be a Christian is by the work of the spirit to come and share in the father's love for the son and the son's love for the father to enter into this knowing this triune God.

This is what God thinks of his son and yet the tragedy is that the people have a different view.

Verse 15 Peter says you and the accusations come you killed the author of life.

[21 : 53] Now just get your head around that. Right? You killed the author of life. You rejected the holy and righteous one. So he's making it clear that they've got Jesus badly wrong and the miracle proves it.

And yet here's what this man's perfect health is proof of. You killed him but God verse 18 you killed but God fulfilled. See it?

Verse 18 fulfilled. And this is what the Bible is friends. It's the story of what God has done and is doing in Christ. It's the story of his eternal purposes, his international heart, his unrelenting kindness and his pursuing grace.

So the story here, Peter's saying Jesus has not just come from left field. It's always been about him.

I love it we read with our girls, the Sally Lloyd Jones, the children's storybooks Bible.

You know our phrase and I love this, every story whispers his name. Every story whispers his name and Peter just doesn't give them the answer.

[23 : 02] Remember your math teacher at school, show your work in. Well Peter says come on then. Takes them on a wee history lesson to see it. Really quickly verse 17 he takes them to the prophets. They were talking about the suffering servant, the one God would send to willingly and unflinchingly lay down his life to win God's people.

That was about Jesus. That's his point. That was Jesus. He is the suffering servant. Verse 22 he takes them to Moses. Moses speaking to his generation about a greater prophet who God would raise up and when the prophet comes the people are to listen, hang on his every word.

That was Jesus. Verse 25 to Abraham who through one of his offspring God was going to bless the nations of the world. that offspring is Jesus.

Every story whispers his name. This is the point. Every story whispers his name and far from being simply an impressive equation, here's what's on offer.

And I want you to get this. If you've tuned out over the last 10 minutes, tune in for this last little section. Here's what's on offer. Verse 19 Come to God so that your sins may be wiped out.

[24 : 16] Wiped out. our sins. I remember in our school classroom when we went from blackboards to white boards. Right? Teacher asking us when we had a blackboard, does anyone want to clean the blackboard?

Everyone's hands by their side. But we got a whiteboard. Man alive we've never seen anything like this. Got to spray it, got to wipe it. Anyone want to help? Everyone's hands up.

The joy of making something spotlessly clean. And this is what this is saying. It wiped out our sins. wiped out our sins. It's what Christ has done on the cross.

It's what it means to be his. And at times of refreshing, do you see it? Times of refreshing may come from God. And I think that's Peter's exact point as he lands it in verse 26.

When God raised up his servant he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways. It's almost like he's saying you guys have got first dibs on this invitation.

[25 : 20] And he draws a direct line between turning and listening to Jesus and knowing God's blessing. God's blessing is found in responding rightly to the risen and glorified Christ.

And in so doing knowing him, knowing God is your father. Knowing him. God's blessing is found in God's blessing to him. You know, Luke's given us two big reasons, right?

And I think just as we close the question, the end becomes, becomes a bit more pointed, it becomes, are you listening to Jesus? Are we allowing his voice?

And this is a challenge for all of us here today. Are we allowing his voice, his truth, as we encounter him in the pages of scripture, are we allowing him to direct and to fill our hearts and our minds?

You know, when was the last time you sat down and you were just thrilled with the voice of your shepherd? When was the last time that he spoke deeply into your soul? Friends, we need to be listening to him.

[26 : 25] We need him. What a great king. What a wonderful shepherd. Listen, our time is gone, but I just want to give you this one story just as we close. It's a story about my friends down at Charlotte Chapel, Paul Rees.

He told me a story about six months ago about an older man in his congregation who died, and he did the funeral. The days leading up to the funeral, he goes to visit the family, and the family gave him the old man's Bible.

So Paul gets home, he's kind of going through it, just interested in what's going on, flicking through it, and all of a sudden he stops at a page because he notices a huge circle, huge circle around this page in the guy's Bible.

I don't know if you do that, I do that, just underline it. He's a huge, huge circle, and it's a circle around the words of Psalm 130. If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?

But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can with reverence serve you. And this old man never got over the joy of in Christ being right with God, and knowing him as father, and as he particularly approached the end of his earthly life, knowing in Christ what the future held.

[27 : 44] Why? Because of this promise in Psalm 130. Repent then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah who has been appointed for you, even Jesus.

Heaven must receive him, until the time comes for God to restore everything as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

Friends, our souls need Acts 3. Our souls need Acts 3. And may God through his spirit encourage us this morning. Let's pray. I heard the voice of Jesus say, Behold, I freely give.

The living water, thirsty one, stoop down and drink and live. I came to Jesus and I drank of that life-giving stream.

My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in him. Father, thank you so much for your love for us.

[29 : 00] Thank you for giving us your spirit as a guarantee of the future. As a Lord, I pray for us today, whoever is watching this, whether we're in the building, Father, that you would strengthen our souls with the promises that we read in Acts 3.

The promise, the truth of the glorified Jesus. Oh, Lord, help us to find our identity in him and everything that he's accomplished for us and everything that lies ahead of us now and wonderfully in the future.

Father, thank you that you love us and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.