

The Jesus Revolution

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[0 : 00] Well folks, wonderful to be with you this morning. Hope you're well. Hope those who are joining us online are doing okay as well. Let's come back to God's holy word, shall we? Acts chapter 5 is where we are today. Why don't you turn there and we're back in our series of Acts.

We're joining this group, remember, of about 5,000 people who have decided to follow Jesus and who collectively together make up this early church.

And one of the central figures to our passage today is this guy called Gamaliel. Gamaliel is one of the respected religious leaders of the day. And what we get in this passage is his take on this whole Jesus of Nazareth business.

So let me try and get us to the kind of heart of what he makes of it. Here are three famous faces from history on the screen. And I want you to think about the word which connects them.

So we have Shea Guevara, we've got Joan of Arc, and we've got William Wallace. I thought I'd put Mel Gibson up there because I know some of you love the historical accuracy of that film. Okay, so there are three people. What's the word that connects them?

[1 : 11] Revolutionaries, not freedom. Revolutionaries. Revolutionaries, right? So somebody who goes against the establishment, somebody who rallies against the cultural norms, somebody who's not accepting of the status quo.

Right? Revolutionaries. And that's Gamaliel's take on this whole Jesus of Nazareth movement. If you come with me to the text, you'll see that he puts Jesus in the same category as two local guys who've just led many revolts.

Right? Come with me. Verse 36. Here's our two guys. Verse 36. Thedias, number one. And Judas the Galilean, verse 37.

Two guys who've led many revolts in recent history. And what connects these two men is that they both rolled up in Jerusalem claiming to be somebodies. Right? Do you see that?

Claimed to be somebodies. Had a cause. Had a mob. But in the end, time proved. With hindsight, we can look back and see that these somebodies were in fact nabodies.

[2 : 25] And Gamaliel reckons that the same thing may well end up happening with this little Jesus revolution.

Do you see how he thinks it's only going to go one of two ways? Right? It's either going to be like a sparkler that you have in fireworks night.

Do you remember those when you were young? Sparkling fireworks night. You would write your name, take a couple of cool photos, wave it around. Looked really impressive for a while. And then after a couple of minutes, the thing completely fizzled out.

Or it will be like a spreading forest fire that you cannot hope to contain. Remember having that experience?

Alex and I were in Sicily in a place called Agrigento. And it's the only time in my life where I've witnessed a forest fire. Have you ever seen one of these things? Right? Devastating.

[3 : 21] What started as a kind of just a few trees fizzling away. After only 10 or so minutes, you saw the thing with the wind taking it, engulfing a whole farm.

Fire engines coming, one by one lining up, trying to hose water onto the thing. Realized after a while there was not a chance to be putting this out. So, this Jesus revolution is either going to be sparkler or it's going to be forest fire.

Sparkler or forest fire. And the reader reading on in this, we're supposed to ask the question, which is it going to be? And here's what that means.

That means if you're here today and you follow Jesus of Nazareth, Gamaliel has just called you a revolutionary. Cool.

Kind of edgy, isn't it, to be called a revolutionary? But that's what he's just labeled you if you follow Jesus of Nazareth. A revolutionary. And let's be honest. You live your life as a Christian today. [4 : 27] And it doesn't take you long to realize that you feel like a revolutionary living in our culture, does it? I mean, I'll just give you... Here's a couple of things I noticed this week. Just perception. Just seeing what's round about.

Going up into the Royal Mile this week and there's a big statue of who at the top? David Hume. Right? Leader of the Scottish Enlightenment back in the day. Very simply, a man, I'm putting this really simply, a man who stood for the fact that science and reason have done away with any need for a belief in God. Right? And there he is, slap bang in the middle of our city.

You walk past him and you think to yourself, I feel like a revolutionary. Okay? One of our local high schools. Just over the road there. Big sign. Straight outside.

That says, some people are trans. Get over it. Okay? So that anybody looking on from our Christian persuasion or from our friends from other faith groups or our secular friends who might want to ask a question or two, enter into a respectful and a loving conversation about these things, is told in no uncertain terms that that isn't happening.

[5 : 32] Right? You feel like a revolutionary, don't you? Capital letters. Revolutionary. But the thing is, I think, that if the book of Acts has taught us anything, it's that the people of the world are not the opposition.

Right? We're not interested in fighting a culture war. That's not what Christ has called us to do. The people of the world are the mission field. We long to see our friends come to know Jesus and have life with him.

And to quote Don Carson, What is evangelism? What is witnessing? If it's not one beggar telling another beggar where they can find bread.

Okay? And that's why I think this passage today, if you feel like that in your life, if you feel like a revolutionary, if you know what that means, this should greatly strengthen us today. Right? It greatly strengthen us and I hope encourage us to keep living and speaking for Jesus wherever he has put us and loving the people of our city. Because what it's telling us, and this is backed up with thousands of calendars worth of church history, what this is telling us is that the gospel is forest fire rather than sparkler.

[6 : 48] Okay? Because despite the persecution hotting up, and we see it today moving from the threatening to the imprisoning stage, the unstoppable purposes of God continue to be ramping up.

So let's allow the text then, I think, to give us three reasons why we should keep witnessing. And by way of kind of an accessible sermon outline, here is an ABC of the text.

Okay? ABC. Here's your A. God is always adding people. Right? He's always adding people.

So come with me. Verse 12 of chapter 5. Okay? God is continuing to authenticate his apostles. Rubber stamp them as his guys and their message in front of the eyes of the watching world.

Do you see how great signs and wonders are continuing to be done? And if anything, they're kind of getting more incredible. Do you see it? The sick are being healed.

[7 : 53] Evil spirits are being cast out. People are being made whole. Remember what we said a few weeks ago? These wonderful little foretastes of the future as the kingdom of God smashes into the darkness.

What I want us to notice, friends, is how people are responding to what's going on. Right? And how they're responding differently to the gospel message as it goes forward in word and deed.

Okay? In the words of the late John Stott, the presence of the living God will always be alarming to some and attractive to others. Okay?

Alarming to some and attractive to others. That's exactly what we see here. Check out verse 13 and 14. Right? What is some watching this?

How do they react? They find it hugely alarming. Do you see? And despite the fact that they hold the church in high esteem, which I think is another little lesson for us there in terms of how the people of the world view us as a community.

[8 : 59] Right? Hold them in high esteem. Despite that, do you see none of the onlookers dare join this little Jesus of Nazareth group? Do you see it? Because I take it that they understood what siding with the Jesus revolutionaries would mean that they'd have to do, what they'd have to give up, and what it might lead to.

I remember I had a friend at uni called Karen. I remember going out one night, a few of us, talking to her, having an opportunity to speak about the things of Christianity. And this was her phrase always to me.

Jesus, just not yet. Just not yet. Because she saw what it would mean for her that she would have to give up, what she'd have to do, and so she kept saying that phrase to me, just not yet.

And I don't know, but I find those kind of responses incredibly hard. Just long for people to come to know Jesus, know who he is, have life in his name. Just not yet. And yet see what else Luke is telling us was happening at the same time.

Verse 14. More than ever, believers were added to the Lord, both men and women. So do you see it? Others are, some are finding this alarming, some are finding this attractive.

[10:17] And I take it, that as we live our lives today, as we witness for Christ, these two things will be happening at exactly the same time. Alarming, attractive.

Let me just say, we have no idea how the Lord is at work. Our job is just to witness for Christ, believe the results to him. We've got no idea how he has worked, particularly in this season. But let me just encourage you with this. I was listening to an interview recently with John Stevens. John Stevens is the national director of the FIEC, right? Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches. So churches just like us, all up and down the UK.

And he was given just his overview of kind of what he's seeing happening in all these churches, this network of churches that he's in charge of. And he's talking about how the fact, the fact that he has never before in his lifetime heard about so many people joining Christianity Explored courses and Alpha courses and becoming Christians.

Friends, the Lord is always adding people. You know, and it might feel like sometimes we speak about Jesus, we feel what it's like for those to be alarmed.

[11:21] But let's be encouraged that all over the world, the Lord is always adding people. He's always adding people. Let's move from the A to the B, okay?

Here's the B that should encourage us this morning from this text. God is always bigger than the barriers. He's always bigger than the barriers, okay? Verse 17. Do you see how the success that the apostles were having, it didn't go unnoticed by the religious leaders?

Do you see that? What's their response to it? Luke tells us they are jealous. Sometimes the thing is that when we see these things crop up in our lives, these emotions, anger, we'll see that in a few weeks' time, jealousy.

I was going to ask, what's going on in the heart? What is it revealing? Well, these guys are jealous because the only thing that they are interested in is retaining their status and power. And because of that, do you see how the apostles soon find themselves in prison?

Text makes it clear, guards are at the door, they're locked in, okay, and I take it they're to be released in the morning so that they can appear before the religious court. So the religious powers that be here are flexing their muscles.

[12:35] And at this point, you'd be tempted to think, wouldn't you? It's like playing a PlayStation game when you were young, okay, and you get defeated. And what's those words that comes on the screen? Game over. Right?

Is this game over for the early church? Well, remember, the whole point of this passage is that God will not be stopped. Okay? And supernaturally, verse 19, the angel of the Lord appears and takes them out and tells them to go where?

Back to the temple. Do you see it? Back to the temple. So not anywhere. It's no coincidence that these men are told to keep going back to the temple.

I think theologically, let me just say that's significant because for a people in this day for whom the temple represents God with us. It is significant the message of God having saved us and is now with us in a new and a far more significant way by faith in the risen Christ.

It's hugely significant that it's there that it's being proclaimed. But I love in the text how we get the whole scene as the religious leaders try and figure out what has happened.

[13:47] Do you see how Luke helps us see it? Records the details for us. They cannot figure out how this has happened. I mean these guys are like relighting candles on a birthday cake.

Right? You ever had those things? How annoying are those things? You just cannot put them out. You just cannot put them out. These guys are like relighting candles. Again, do you see it? God always wins.

God will have his people where he wants his people. I remember having the experience of starting a new job calling up the IT department and saying can you come and help me kind of set up my computer?

Right? The person on the phone comes back and says sure, do you mind if I take over your screen? You ever had an experience like this? Do you mind if I take over your screen? Never seen this before. And all of a sudden I'm looking at my screen and I'm not in control anymore.

Right? The cursor's moving around and files are being moved. Settings are being adjusted. Icons are being moved to the right places. You're not in charge of the screen anymore.

[14:46] Right? And that's exactly what God is doing here. It's almost like he's pressed the override button and he's declaring to the world no, I am sovereign and I will have my people where I want my people.

You think you can do this to my apostles? I will have them where I want my people. God's declaration to the world that he is sovereign.

Okay? And they say to the apostles verse 28 we told you to stop speaking. You filled Jerusalem with your teaching.

I mean talk about making an impact on a city. You filled Jerusalem with your teaching and notice the irony of what they say next. And I think the ESV probably picks this up slightly better.

Right? Quite literally you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood on us. Okay? Remember we said a few weeks ago Luke's into irony you intend to bring this man's blood on us.

[15:50] You can imagine them thinking to themselves yes that's exactly what we're trying to do. That's exactly what we're trying to do. Remember they're speaking to a group of people who are pursuing a very different way of trying to be right with God.

Okay? By their own works by their own merit by being seen to be living in a right way. You know they always say that you can explain the difference between Christianity and every other world religion and philosophy in two letters.

Right? Letters N and E. Not do but done. Right? Not what we do makes us right with God but what Jesus has done.

Okay? It's the only way to be right with God. We friends, we need his blood on us. We need the blood of God's sacrificial lamb shed in our place on the cross on us to forgive us for our sin to be justified before this holy God.

So when they say you're intent on bringing this man's blood on us they think of themselves of course we are. Stop speaking. No chance. We've got to obey God rather than man.

[17:01] And let me just say that that's what we believe as Christians that God calls us to be praying for and submitting to our government. That's why we've done things that we've done them over the last year and a half.

That's why we've been praying for our leaders consistently over the last season. That's what God calls us to do but if ever we are told to stop speaking about Christ or to stop living in the way that he has called us to live then friends that is maybe where we differ.

Right? And where our primary loyalty to King Jesus kicks in. What do they say? They say we can't stop speaking about him.

Right? We are witnesses to these things that God exalted Christ and he commands people everywhere to repent and believe. That is the message that the world needs to hear of God's great love.

And sending his son. Listen friends God is always bigger than the barriers. He's always bigger than the barriers. He's always adding people. He's always bigger than the barriers and here's our sea that God is always conforming us to Christ.

[18:17] Okay? Have a look at verse 41 and I think this is probably one of the biggest impacts that this text made on me this week. Couldn't get my head around what's going on at verse 41. Right? The religious council.

They're convinced Spigameli's advice. Right? They think no that sounds good. Makes sense. But even then do you see how it doesn't stop them giving the disciples a good flogging.

Right? I take it this is the 39 lashes. Okay? That's what the Romans reckoned was pretty much enough to scare a person without killing them. 40 was supposed to be the one that killed them so you give them 39 you teach them a lesson but you don't kill them.

Okay? How did the disciples react to that flogging? Do you see what he said? Then they left the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. Now take an inhale of that verse. They what? They rejoiced at that? It's not like they got the kicks out of casualty or something like that, right?

[19 : 22] They rejoiced at that? How do you explain that? Well do you know what? It's almost as if God is taking the cookie cutter, the Christ cookie cutter and he slapped it on the dough of their lives and their lives at this point are beginning to line up with Christ's beginning to resemble heads.

You know it reminded me of the you know this is a famous scene in The Lion King and it's Mephasa walking ahead and he plants a big paw print on the ground and then little Simba comes on behind and his little paw goes into the big paw and it's I think he's getting a row at the time but it's this scene where it's almost as if Simba needs to bring his life in line with his dad.

You know that scene big paw little paw? It's almost what the disciples sense at this point I'd imagine that their lives are beginning to line up with their kings.

And despite the bleeding and the lacerations in this moment the pattern of their lives is becoming cross-shaped and I think this is where the text made an impact on me this week.

That this is where joy is to be found. You see? This is where joy is to be found when our lives begin to emulate more and more the shape of our kings.

[20 : 42] Just imagine these locals leaving Jerusalem watching these men as they're leaving the Sanhedrin. Completely baffled, seeing them bleeding. Completely baffled, seeing what's going on, the joy that's there is thinking how do you explain that?

How do you explain why they are filled with joy and yet they're covered in bruises and cuts? How do you explain what's going on there? Sometimes it's like when our life's friends conform to Christ, that is where joy is to be found.

In knowing him, in living for him, in witnessing for him. That's where joy is to be found. Let me just say our world is full of joy pretenders. You want to know what these are?

Just go into W. Smith's or something like that. Look what's on the magazine shelf. What are the magazines all about? What's the world trying to sell us? What are they all about? Your body, their all about relationships and sex, their all about your finances, their all about your perfect home, their all about sports.

Things that the world says will give you and we look at this and we have to say that is so countercultural from what our world is saying. This is where joy is to be found.

[21 : 53] Let me just say following Christ will always look like death and it will always look like foolishness to the world and yet this text is telling us this is where it is. This is where it is.

You know it probably won't mean for us I'd imagine in our lives that we will be flogged for following Jesus but let's remember that for countless millions of people around the world and different parts of our world brothers and sisters it will mean this.

But friends are we our lives being shaped to Christ in a million little decisions that we make every day? Okay students you're thinking about the job that you're going to take next you're thinking about what's coming after this is following Christ top of your agenda.

Right picking a job that doesn't mean you're going to have to sell your soul. Picking a job in a place where you'll thrive in a local church. you'll have chances to speak for him. Families what are we teaching our kids about what success looks like?

Right? The good in their lives is not grades. The good in their lives is God. This is where joy will be found. Are we shaping our lives? Are we making decisions based on this truth?

[23 : 02] Retired people, do people in your lives know that once you finish that the S that's dominating your life is not sombrero in Spain. Right? The S in your life is service to the local church.

Friends, if you live on your own, do people know, do they look in and they see that you're not defined by your relationship status? You're defined by the fact that you know the most fully human person who ever lived.

Friends, it's our joy found in knowing Christ. They rejoiced because they knew him and their lives were lining up with his.

We're going to see this even more in a few weeks time as the persecution hots up even more. That you look at a man called Stephen and you think to yourself, he is oozing Christ.

Oozing him. Friends, this is where joy is to be found. The words of Matt Chandler, brilliant book called Take Heart. If you want to read it after this, there's a copy of my office, brilliant book.

[24 : 08] When Satan says he's taken everything worth having from you, grace says he can never take what you most need, Jesus Christ. And so day by day in the temple and from house to house, right, notice this is not just a public thing, this is a neighbor's thing, and this is among the believers as well.

What are they doing? They're preaching that Jesus is the Messiah. And so friends, as we close this morning, do you see it? What is the gospel? What is this message?

Is it sparkler? Is it forest fire? Do you see that it's forest fire? And so do you see then that the advice that Gamaliel gives at verse 39 is bang on the money, right?

Whether he intended it like this or not, he's bang on the money, but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. And then what does he say?

You might actually be found to be what? Fighting against God. So think about it, who's the real revolutionary according to Gamaliel? Okay?

[25 : 19] Those who are trying to fight against God. Which the proof of the pudding shows us is those who remain defiant in terms of bowing the knee to King Jesus.

If that's you today, friends, know that you are going into the boxing ring against God, right? You going in there is like a raging two-year-old fancying their chances against a physical peak Mike Tyson.

You will not hope to fight God and win. But the good news of the gospel, friends, is that the God who should be rightly fighting us because of our sin offers us what? What's the opposite of fighting? Peace. He offers us peace by the blood of this Jesus spilled on the cross on us. On us.

Interestingly enough, do you know what I was saying? It was a guy named Paul who himself was a pupil under this guy, Gamaliel, who we're going to meet in a few weeks' time, who was spitting feathers. You heard that phrase before? Spitting feathers at the church because of what they stood for before encountering Jesus and joining him.

[26 : 23] It was this Paul under this Gamaliel who would later write in Ephesians about Jesus that he himself is our peace. He is our peace.

Purposes of God, so the opposition hots up. Friends, know that the purposes of God continue to ramp up. Stand up, stand up for Jesus.

Stand in his strength alone. The arm of flesh will fail you. You dare not trust your own. Put on the gospel armor. Each piece put on with prayer.

Where duty calls or danger be never wanting there. Stand up, stand up for Jesus. Friends, that's the call this week as we speak and live for him in our city. Let's pray. So, Heavenly Father, we just thank you so much, Lord, for your precious word.

And the words of Psalm 38, that salvation, the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord. He is their refuge in times of trouble. And so, Lord, I pray for us today, Lord, as we absorb your word, Lord, that your spirit would encourage us.

[27 : 39] Father, that he would inspire us. And, Father, that you would help us to be mindful of the opportunities that are ours this week. Father, we long that our lives would be more like our kings.

And so, Father, thank you for the example of the early church all these years ago. That we have your word in our language. We can read this and see what people went through and what you were doing in the gospel that was bigger than the barriers.

And so, Father, we thank you for this morning. Lord, may this encourage our hearts, we pray, in Jesus' worthy name. Amen.