

20th April 2008 – “The Church of Jesus” – Acts 4:5-37
“The Apostles who could not be quiet”

HANDOUT AVAILABLE

What if Jesus was just a memory?

* **III** – Victor Chang was a well known heart surgeon. Between 1984 and 1990, he performed over 197 heart transplants and 14 heart-lung transplants. He started developing the artificial heart and mechanical heart valves – technology that has led to thousands of lives being saved. Until on July 4th, 1991 he was shot dead in Mosman in a kidnapping attempt. He never operated again. All that is left are memories, and a legacy of the great work he left behind.

* **III** – “Imagine” – John Lennon was a prolific song writer. Whether you loved or hated his music, most of us have probably heard a lot of it. In December 1980, a man named Mark David Chapman shot Lennon dead. From that day on, John Lennon wrote no more music. All that is left are memories and a legacy of songs.

Because in our world death is final. After death, all that’s left are memories.

If Victor Chang had lived on, he could have saved more lives. Or done more research. But he was killed. And his work is finished.

If John Lennon had lived on, he could have written some of the greatest songs of today. But he was killed. And his work is finished.

What if Jesus had lived on? What if he wasn’t crucified in his mid 30s? He could have healed more and taught more. But he didn’t. He was killed. But do we just have memories? Is Jesus just a historical figure (like Victor Chang / John Lennon) who will be remembered for his teaching and his miracles? Is Jesus’ work finished? Is Jesus just a memory today?

In Acts 4, we meet Caiaphas and Annas, who think exactly that – to them, Jesus is dead. Just a memory. These two men were the high priests who actually had Jesus handed over to Pilate to be killed. And now they stand in front of two of his disciples, Peter and John, who have just healed a 40 year old man who was a cripple from birth. Annas and Caiaphas think that Jesus is now just a memory. But as they confront Peter and John, they’re astonished by what they hear.

Annas and Caiaphas ask them *“By what power or name did you do this?”*

* *Let’s read verses 8-10 – READ*

Peter and John claim to heal in the name of the LIVING Jesus, with the power of the LIVING Jesus. They claim that Jesus is not just a memory, but that he is alive!

And then Peter and John go on to say in verse 12 words that, even today, greatly offend people:

* v12 *“Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is **no other name** under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”*

Salvation is found in no-one else.

Now, I don’t know how much clearer the Bible can make that point.

* Perhaps John 14:6 when Jesus says: *“No-one comes to the Father except through me.”*

* Perhaps 1 Timothy 2:5-6 that says *“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”*

* Perhaps John 3:18 that says: *“Whoever does not believe (in Jesus) is already condemned”*

* Perhaps 1 John 5:12 that says *“He who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”*

This message is offensive to many people because it offers no alternative. No choice. It gives one way. If you want to be saved there is one name which you must call upon. And it is not Allah. It is not Buddha, it is not Krishna. It is Jesus Christ. Alone.

When the priests hear this, they respond in a similar to the way our world today responds to this word from God.

* Verse 18: BE QUIET! Stop talking about him! And what do Peter and John say? NO!

III – I remember some years ago reading an article in the Sydney Morning Herald about people in the workplace complaining about Christians who talk about God at work. They complained. They wanted Christians to stop talking about Jesus. To stop talking about their faith. They found it annoying and some found it offensive.

Today, several years after reading that article, I wonder if that's a problem any more? I wonder if people are sick of hearing us speak about Jesus? Because I wonder in our world today, **DO** we speak?

Australia – the lucky country?

People say we're lucky to live in a country like Australia today, where Christians don't face persecution like the apostles did. Thousands of Christians are killed every year through persecution, and we consider ourselves 'lucky' that we aren't among those persecuted for our faith – but perhaps we're not persecuted because we don't speak, and therefore we don't offend?

Have a look at verse 20.

* *"We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."*

Can we say that today? Can YOU say that today? The apostles didn't care about the threats of the high priests. Peter and John say to their face: WE DO NOT FEAR YOU! Our salvation comes from Jesus alone. We don't need to be saved BY you, and we don't need to be saved FROM you! They say to them in verse 19: Who do YOU think we should listen to? You... or God?

They stand in the face of their accusers and say: "We cannot be quiet! And you cannot make us be quiet." What about you? Can you say: "I cannot be quiet about Jesus!"?

III – Here's a good example for today: In NSW, we have a **legal right** to teach Scripture in our local schools. Every government school has to give us up to an hour a week to teach Christianity to students who might be interested. We have the right to openly share our faith in our public schools. BUT, across our state, there is a shortage of Scripture teachers! You would think, in this lucky country, Christians would walk up to scripture teachers and say: "You're so lucky – I applied for a Scripture class, but there weren't enough to go around!"

It's almost like the world says to us – "Here you go – walk into our schools and teach the kids about your God." And our response is, "Well, we have a *few* of people who could do that."

And what about the rest of our community? Schools are a place we're allowed to go with the gospel. Other places aren't so easy. And it's no surprise that not everyone *goes* to church on a Sunday. Therefore, we're not going to have the opportunity to tell everyone about the great news of Jesus by staying in this building and talking about Jesus. We need to go out to them. We need Christians who not only take every opportunity but Christians who make new opportunities to share the message of Jesus. Waitara has a population that has nearly doubled in the last 5 years, – how do we reach this growing community? What plans do *you* have? Let's not just think "What's our church doing?" Think "What am I doing?" Have I thought about that? Can I do something? Can I start something?

The high priests said to the disciples: "Be Quiet!" But they **wouldn't** be quiet. They **couldn't** be quiet. Faced with these threats, they return to the other believers and **what do they do**? They pray. and what do they pray?...

* READ vv29-30 : *"Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."*

The impact of our church...

They pray for boldness. They don't pray for protection. They pray that God will make them ***bold*** in the face of their enemies. They're faced with death threats and they pray for strength and boldness to keep going. And God empowered them by the Holy Spirit, and they went out.

And as they went out, they went out together. Verse 32 tells us they shared everything they had. They didn't consider anything they had to be "theirs". All they had belonged to the church of Jesus. Where the church had a need, they gave. When a person needed help, they gave that person help. When ministry was needed, they stepped forward and did it. They had one common purpose. Their family, their children, their work, their homes – nothing got in the way of their purpose of going out, together, speaking about Jesus.

You know what I would love to see? I would love to see All Saints Waitara have a bigger impact on our community than Westfield does. A bigger impact than the RSL club. A bigger impact than the football game that's on this weekend. Imagine... if people's lives were more challenged and shaped through the ministry of the church of Jesus here in Waitara, than they were by Westfield, or football, or drugs, or alcohol, or gambling? Imagine people being more hungry for the message of Jesus than they are for the buffet meal at the RSL. Don't you think it's sad that the lives of people in our society are more shaped by shopping and eating and football and mortgages than they are by Jesus? And do we believe, as a church, and as Jesus' disciples in this world, that we can see that changed by the power of the ***living*** Lord Jesus, if we are bold?

It's not enough to have our service times printed on the board outside.

It's not enough *just* to mention to people at work that we go to church on Sunday. I can't imagine the apostles stopping there.

It's not enough to run special dinners and market days, or carols on the lawn and café church, have a new building, more staff, and new programs – these things are not enough.

These things are very *helpful*. But even ***with*** all these things, let me suggest that we still have one big problem today. **The way we DO church expects people to come to us.** I hope, and pray, that as we've been looking at the church of Acts, we have seen one thing – the church of Jesus is a "going out" church.

People often look for "the easy answer" to growing a church. I could go to a different seminar each week in Sydney on the latest "tricks" for ministry. A new way of doing things. And at All Saints we are trying new ways of doing ministry. And that's a good thing! We need to reach new generations and different cultures in new and different ways. But while these ways may help us, they are not the answer. The answer is... are you ready for it? The answer is... you.

The answer is when ***you*** say: "My God! I cannot help speaking about you. I want to use every opportunity. I want to hold nothing back. I want to commit all I have to this mission to see lives changed. I want my community to be shaped more by Jesus than anything else.

My time is not my own. My possessions are not my own. My humiliation is not my own. My words are not my own. My life is not my own. Imagine every one of us having that heart attitude?

Wouldn't it be nice at the end of a week for every one of us to be able to say "God, I made every opportunity this week to tell people about you! I could not have spent more time! I could not have given more! I could not have cared for people better. I could not have gone to more extreme lengths for the gospel!"

For THIS CHURCH to be the church that God wants us to be, we need every one of us who is committed to Jesus to say: "I cannot stop speaking about Jesus!"

**** The question is not what WE COULD do, but what YOU WILL do.**

Let's pray – for boldness and for opportunities. [Prayer: for someone today to be bold enough to do something about sharing the gospel with our community.]