

All The Words of This Life

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[0 : 00] In Acts chapter 5, we read verse 19 and especially verse 20. The angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors and brought them forth and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. The thing that we notice here right away is that it's not a sort of religious practice that the angel instructs the apostles to speak.

Jesus has not commissioned them simply to reiterate the same ordinances and laws and commandments that they already had for centuries in which it was the business of the priests and to an extent the Pharisees to reproduce and to pass on word by word and ritual by ritual.

But rather, as it were, those schoolmaster lessons, those rods of discipline which had been used to train up the Lord's people in the way that they should go and channel them into the narrow way, had now, we might say, fulfilled their purpose and brought the Lord's people to the time of the Messiah. Whence all these things were to have their fruition. When you have the full fruit upon the bough of the tree, you don't lament for the loss of the blossom or the bud.

[1 : 28] You take the fruit, you rejoice in the fruit, you eat the fruit and you delight in that which the tree has produced. This life, all the words of this life demonstrates that which the gospel of Jesus Christ is and is intended to be.

It is life from the dead because it is not the mere words that are life-changing. It is the power of God. The power of God unto salvation because it is the power of God that enters into a soul thus brought alive and which changes, which transforms their life from mere existence to life in all its fullness.

As Paul wrote to the Romans, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the two firsts and also to the Greek.

One thing we might notice here as well, however, is that once it is about this life, this transforming life, which we read about in the early verses that we read from there, how this is a life which flowing through the apostles, not originating with them, but flowing through them, is that which has the power to heal, just as Jesus did in his earthly ministry.

And to do so, we must presume in greater numbers than he was ever in a position to do, being, if we can say it reverently, just one man doing all these miracles throughout Judea and Galilee and so on.

[3 : 03] The apostles now are many. And people are coming, they are thronging into Jerusalem to receive this healing power. But it is a power, it is a life force which they recognize they cannot find, merely with the Pharisees or with the priestly rituals and the sacrifices and so on.

And no doubt this is one reason why the chief priests and the teachers of the law and so on are so opposed to the disciples. Anybody can look good until something better comes along.

You know, in the world of the blind, the one-eyed is king. But if somebody comes along with two eyes, then they are far better equipped to lead and to rule.

If I want to take out a violin and to attempt to sort of play away and do my own stumbling efforts, everybody who can't play the violin might think, Oh look, that's not bad, he's getting sounds out of that.

But then if a really accomplished violinist comes along and starts playing really beautifully, then suddenly I don't look so good anymore. Because somebody else has come along that really can do it.

[4 : 09] Now, the chief priests and the teachers of the law and the rulers of the people, up until this time have been the kingpins of the people of Israel.

The religious and cultural and national identity has been summed up in their leadership. Their focus and their power base has been the temple.

The fact that everybody comes to the temple for the sacrifices, for the worship of which they are the leaders. But this has almost become to them almost a racket.

Something which they are milking for their own benefit, rather than something which is the channel of the true spirituality of the relationship that ought to persist between God and his people.

Well, you can take that by just one little instance. You know, there the apostles are, first thing in the morning, there they are, declaring, as the angel told them to do, the words of this life.

[5 : 12] And yet the council is busy meeting and they say, Right, send to the prison and bring these men out. And they say, Well, they're not in the prison anymore. And it needs somebody to come and tell them, Oh, they're in the temple.

You know, who is gathering here? It's priests. It's the chief priests whose business ought to be the temple, whose business ought to be the sacrifices, burning the incense, ordering the worship of the house of God.

Why aren't they in the house of God? Why aren't they doing the job they're meant to be doing, instead of gathering to plot the deaths of men who are standing proclaiming the truth as it is in the Messiah of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who are bringing the temple precincts to life.

And if they were even in the temple themselves, they would have witnessed this. But instead they are meeting separately, trying to plot their downfall. Because life in all its moments makes the imitation and the empty ritual to be seen for as dead as it is.

Go and stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. At the moment, the apostles' witness and testimony is, we might say, temple-centered.

[6 : 35] We read at the end of Luke's account of the gospel. And remember that Acts, of course, is a continuation of Luke's account, really. And after Jesus ascended into heaven, they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.

That's how Luke's account of the gospel ends. And the disciples are still in the temple, praising and blessing God, speaking all the words of his life. Notice also that it says that by the hands of the apostles, this is verse 12, many signs and wonders were wrought among the people.

They were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes, both of men and of women, insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks and them which were vexed with unclean spirits, and they were healed every one.

Now Jesus, in his earthly ministry, he went out and about through the villages and the towns and Galilee and Judea and Decapolis. And wherever he went, he'd teach and he'd preach and he'd heal people.

[7 : 53] Here we have the disciples based in the temple, based in Jerusalem, and people who want healing come into them. They flow into the temple.

They flow into Jerusalem. The chief priests sought to be happy about this. But instead they are plotting to kill the disciples. Verse 33, when they heard that, they were cut to the heart and to counsel to slay them.

This is what they intend to do, to kill them if they can. Because the disciples have said, verse 30, the God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you slew and hanged on a tree.

Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a prince and a savior, in other words the Messiah, the fulfillment of it all, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things.

And so is also the Holy Ghost whom God hath given to them that obey him. In other words, if he hasn't given it to you, chief priests and Pharisees, it's because you don't obey him.

[8 : 56] And when they heard that, they were cut to the heart and to counsel to slay them. How can these men possibly have something that we don't have? How can they have an authority, a power of life that we don't have?

Well, God gives his gifts freely. And without any kind of qualification or respect of persons, he chooses whom he will give his gifts to, who he will give the power of this life to.

And at the moment, remember, it is temple center. It is Jerusalem center. People are flowing into the temple. They are coming to the very center and soul of Israelite identity.

At the moment, the gospel is not yet going out to all the Gentiles and to all the world. Because the angel has said, Go and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

Now, where this phrase, the people, is used in Scripture to an extent in the New Testament, but especially in the Old Testament, it tends to mean not simply a population in general.

[10:02] The people means the people of Israel. It means the Israelite nation, the Jews. And if it doesn't mean them, it speaks about the nations, or the Gentiles, the heathen, the scum of the earth, the dogs.

That's what they were regarded as. Those who are outside of the people of Israel are the Gentiles, and really just the dust of the earth, as it were. They weren't even properly people at all, as far as the Jews were concerned.

But what could that snobbery possibly be based on? It was based on the fact that the Israelites considered themselves the privileged and unique people of God.

But instead of being a source then of humility, and of that which humbled them because of the great privilege that was theirs, they regarded it instead as a right, as a badge of superiority.

How could God not bless us? After all, we are his people. We are special. We are unique. Of course we are better than everybody else. And miss the fact that this uniqueness is dependent upon the grace of God, and not upon anything that they were in and of themselves.

[11:17] The words of this life is about the life that there is in Christ. And although the chief priests would seek to contain it and to stop it from growing, you know, did we not strictly charge you that you should not teach in this name?

And behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. And when Gamaliel persuades him to leave these men alone in case this message be of God, then we read, to him they agreed.

And when they had called the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. And see how successful that was. They departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name, and daily in the temple and in every house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

You can't keep down this life. This is one reason it is called life. It will find a way out.

You know, Paul writes to Timothy, 2 Timothy chapter 2, at verse 9, Whereunto I suffer trouble as an evildoer, evil unto bonds, but the word of God is not bad.

[12:34] Now, somebody once said they noticed at one time in an old church that had flagstone floors up towards the front of the church, they noticed a little stalk of I think it was corn or wheat or something growing up through a crack in the flagstones.

How on earth did that get there? And eventually, through investigation and so on, they realised that it must have happened through, from a previous, maybe a harvest Thanksgiving service or something they had whereby somebody had brought bread or sheep of wheat or whatever, and one of the little kernels had come loose from the stalk of wheat or whatever it was and had rolled down and found its way down a little crack in the flagstone into the earth beneath and no doubt and no doubt had burrowed away in there and become embedded and then had found its way begun to germinate and what will the shoot do?

It will look for the light. You might think there was not much light up through a wee crack of a crack of a flagstone but there's more light there than there is in all the darkness around the back so it heads for the light and it goes up through the crack and there it was suddenly beginning to push its way up through the wee crack in the flagstone this little stalk of wheat nobody knew where it had come from till we finally deduced where it must have originated.

You see life will find a way and it cannot be contained and it cannot be crushed down and it will always find a way out through and so likewise the word of God is a living word and it will find its way through.

In China of course they're busy trying to constrict the Christian church trying to stop them from having full Bibles forbidding them from having the Ten Commandments displayed in churches and pulling down crosses from the tops of churches and seeking to oppress even the official state sanctioned church they are seeking to oppress that.

[14 : 38] And what's the effect? What? It's just growing and growing. You just can't keep it down. There are more Christians now in China than there are members of the Communist Party. And elsewhere of course no matter how much people try and suppress the gospel you just can't keep this down.

the words of this life. Now of course this is life because by contrast there is only ongoing death. Back to the beginning and we find that when God creates man chapter 2 of Genesis verse 7 the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul.

He had life in him because God breathed that life into him. Now some translations of course when they describe the scriptures they say all scripture is given by inspiration of God.

And some translations put that as God breathed. It is breathed out as it were by the spirit of God. And that's true it's not inaccurate it's not incorrect and in some ways it sums up the way that the word of God is.

[15 : 53] God has breathed his spirit breathed his truth into his word it has been written down and so it is always alive. It's like you know there's sometimes scientists still find these dinosaur bones you know buried deep in the earth and they're fossilised completely and then they begin to dissect them and cut them over and inside the bones they find soft marrow tissue that is still there and still soft and can still be have DNA extracted from it and so on all these thousands of years after the bones and the body of the creature itself was buried because you can't kill that which is a living thing and you can't kill that which is the life of the word of God.

So God breathed into man's also the breath of life and man became a living soul but same chapter we read when he warns man of every tree of the garden that thou mayest freely eat but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it for on the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die death will enter in if you are disobedient to God if you are separated from God by desiring that which he has forbidden and acting on it then you will die death will enter in and that is the state in which man has been born and conceived ever since generation by generation death now of course nobody likes to be told that they are dead nobody likes to be told of their defects in any way you know it's always perhaps something of a bit of a humiliation or perhaps something we have to swallow down the first time we're ever told when we're in our youth or strength or whatever and say well actually your eyesight isn't that good you need glasses when you need oh no no

I don't need glasses I've got perfectly good vision I can see that notice over there I can see that there and our vanity does not want to admit of needing assistance but eventually we come to a stage where you know actually we can see a lot cleaner if we do put the glasses on it's a bit of a help but I remember in my teens when having suffered from asthma all the way through my childhood it was sometimes bad and sometimes not and I'd taken medicines and so on and eventually the doctors were prescribed inhalers for me in my teens and yes I was glad of the relief that they gave but one thing I wasn't glad about is that once that went on my medical record it was official and it wasn't just that sometimes I had a wheeze or sometimes I struggled breath wise but now it was official I was an asthmatic I needed these inhalers and so on and it was on my record forever afterwards and until it was officially diagnosed

I didn't have it officially I had struggled I had difficulty breathing but until it's officially diagnosed I could pretend that wasn't the case if I have a good day and can breathe okay then that's okay I can pretend it's not there and I don't like to be told oh this is what you've got this is what you need yes it gives relief yes it changes your life but in order to get the relief you have to admit there's a problem and nobody likes doing that and it is hard for the human vanity to admit look you've got a problem you're in living death the life you've got just now it isn't really life it's living death just waiting to die and then going to eternal death that's the human problem you need this life you need this life in all its fullness in order to desire this life and appreciate this life you first have to acknowledge there's a problem not just a medical problem not just a difficulty it's a life threatening condition nobody likes to be told that everybody likes to think no I'm okay

I don't know I'm fine you can't tell me that I'm dying you can't tell me that I need this I'm doing just fine this was the thing the chief priest thought we are doing just fine we don't need all this extra nonsense but the angel of the lord came by night and opened the prison doors the word of god is not banned you can't keep it in brought them forth and said go stand and speak in the temple to the people the people of the city all the words of this life this life which the apostles themselves had first

experienced it's not just well you know we've heard there is this about Jesus of Nazareth and we hear that he can change people's lives no but well we haven't experienced it ourselves you know turn back one page and you see in chapter 4 of verse 20 what Peter and John say they answered the same Jewish leaders and said whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God judge ye for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard that which we ourselves have experienced that which we have known you know that's what know how 1 John begins of course if you remember 1 John chapter 1 where he states their eyewitness so that which we have which was from the beginning which we have heard which we have seen with our eyes which we have looked upon and our hands have handled of the word of life for the life was manifested and we have seen it and bear witness and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father and was ministered unto us that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you that ye may also have fellowship with us and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son

[22 : 00] Jesus Christ and these things write we unto you that your joy may be full this then is the message which we have heard of him and declare unto you that God is light and in him is no darkness at all now in our sin and in our death we like a bit of darkness because a little darkness makes us a little bit you know that a little dimness of the light is kind it hides our faults it hides our difficulties but our difficulties are worth threatening and this life that the apostles have experienced these men who are themselves sinners these men who are not learned leaders they are not chief priests they are not Pharisees they are unlearned men and yet they are transformed by the power of the gospel go stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life life in all its fullness life which is in Christ this is the difference between death and life between mere ritual as the chief priest offered and between life in all its fullness that the apostles are offering through Jesus Christ it is a living relationship now this which they have then this which they have experienced this which is the newness of life that it they can see transforms people this is what

Christ himself of course is offering and man that is without this is effectively not only is he dead he's no better than an animal that's not me being unkind or brutal about it the word of God says it you know Psalm 49 verse 12 nevertheless man being in honour abideth not that means if he is treated with honour if he is exalted it's not going to last you know like abideth not the translation is he doesn't lodge he doesn't abiding all night it doesn't even last a night wake up in the morning and it's gone whatever the honour whatever the vanity the red carpet all the paparazzi and the flash bombs going on and the Oscars and the Globes and all the great honour that men do to each other it's gone in a night it's gone in a moment it doesn't last man being in honour abideth not he is like the beasts that perish without Christ without life there's only death and we're only fooling ourselves this their ways their folly yet their posterity approve their sayings everybody thinks they're great everybody listens to what they say like sheep they are laid in the grave death shall feed on them the upright shall have the meaning over them in the morning and their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling but God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave for he shall receive me notice not

I'll be redeemed because I'm good God will redeem my soul this is the words of this life that God has this power God has this desire man that is in honour verse 20 of Psalm 49 and understand of not is like the beast that perish if he has no wisdom the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom how is he better than an animal how is he better than a beast he isn't he's just acting on instinct man prides himself on his instinct if he's got money and wealth and he'll have the best food or the best facilities or to indulge all his appetites whether physical or food wise or carnal or whatever the case may be how is he different from the beast of the field the beast of the field eats to its heart's content and allows its bodily functions just to go on completely unchecked yes it engages in co-creation when the season takes it when the mood takes it it just acts like a beast of the field and so often people of the world just pride themselves on doing that behaving like the beasts of the field without wisdom without knowledge and they just perish in that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of Christ is life in all its moments

Jesus said if we can go to John chapter 6 remembering what Jesus said this is the Father's will which hath sent me that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing but should raise it up again at the last day life in the midst of death and this is the will of him that sent me that everyone which seeth the Son and believeth on him may have everlasting life and I will raise him up at the last day but Jesus then murmured at him because he said I am the bread which came down from

heaven he said isn't this Jesus the Son of Joseph whose father and mother we know how is it then that he said I came down from heaven Jesus therefore answered and said unto them murmur not among yourselves no man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him and I will raise him up at the last day it is written in the prophets and they shall be all taught of God it is quoting Isaiah 54 at verse 13 they all thy children shall be taught of the Lord and great shall be the peace of thy children that is what Jesus is quoting to be taught

God is to know his peace every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father cometh to me not that any man hath seen the Father say he which is of God ye hath seen the Father verily verily I say unto you he that believeth on me hath everlasting life to know Christ is to have this life all the words of this life I am that bread of life the means by which it is sustained day by day your fathers that eat manna in the wilderness and are dead this is the bread which cometh down from heaven that a man may eat thereof and not die you see people are impressed then as now they're impressed by miracles they're impressed by spectacular deeds the spiritual equipment of a firework display that's what Herod wanted to see when Jesus was brought in Jerusalem just before his death he wanted to see Jesus do a miracle he wanted to see him do something that would be magical something that would be exciting and that's of course what we all to an extent would love to see or crave we love miracles we love diversion but at the end of the day like the true fireworks of course miracles don't last the children of Israel yes they were fed by manna every day in the desert they just got bored with it you know so many miracle after miracle after miracle day after day after day and they just got bored with it and they started complaining that they wanted something else to eat and in due course the manna ceased when they entered the promised land when you don't need the miracle anymore you won't have the miracle anymore miracles were never an end in themselves they were an expression of God's compassion of Christ's mercy the words of this life life in Christ which Jesus said nobody can come to me except the Father draw him this is all that the disciples can set before people they can declare they can speak the words of this life but they can't give it to them they can set it before them you can take the horse the water but you can't make him drink you can set the plate of food before the starving man but you can't make him eat you can set life before the dying soul but you can't make them receive of it stand in the temple and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life

[30 : 09] I think it's the prophet Ezekiel where it says whether they will hear or whether they will forbear they will know that there's been a prophet amongst them and all the words of this life will be either the salvation or the condemnation of the people that hear and whether or not it is the one or the other will be at the human level up to them because that which is set before them they will either receive and accept and be saved by the Christ who is thus declared or they will walk away and they will be condemned at the last day by the testimony and the witness of the words of this life it will either be their salvation or their condemnation life if we will not have it gives us only death light if we switch it out gives us only darkness and so it is with all the words of this life the words that are not only words spoken the words declared and lived out they saw the reality in the apostles we read elsewhere that the chief priests took note of the apostles that they had been with Jesus that they weren't polished and well learned men but they had been with Jesus and it had transformed them it is when people not only hear the words of this life upon our lips but when they see the effect in our lives that they may stand a chance of desiring it for themselves and of being transformed by it all the words of this life it's not just those words uttered loveless it's those words conveyed in our lives and nothing turns off the worldly more than seeing a contrast between what we talk with our mouths and what we live in our lives the word of God cannot be banned but we may choose to bind ourselves by not living out this freedom this liberty this life in all its fullness which the Lord gives to us the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors may he do so likewise for ours and brought them forth and said go stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life where they come where they congregate where they are go there it doesn't matter if you're drawing attention to yourself it doesn't matter if you're drawing trouble to yourself whatever trouble they may visit on you they can't keep you down and even if they kill you they can't silence or bind the word of God the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church as Gamaliel said that which is of God you cannot bind you cannot fight against so you might as well join it you might as well be part of it you might as well declare it you might as well live it go stand speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life that is part