

Alive Again – Resurrection Surprise

Acts 3:11-26

8 May 2022

Rev'd Chris Johnson

When I was a child I remember asking Santa one year for a microscope. I used the word microscope but in my mind I was actually thinking of a magnifying glass. I thought it would be great to go around outside and look at all the plants and insects and see them greatly magnified.

So on Christmas Day when I'm opening my gift and expecting a magnifying glass to my great surprise I found I had received a microscope. This microscope looked incredibly complex, much more involved than a magnifying glass. It had glass panels you could put your specimen on and then you placed them on a tray with a hole in the middle through which you could shine a light from underneath.

Then above the tray looking down on it there were three lens with three levels of magnification on a little dial. There was a very short lens, a medium lens and a long lens and you rotated the dial to which level you wanted to magnify your specimen. You then also had the eye piece and on it was a tiny wheel which you could rotate up or down to focus.

This microscope blew my mind because it was so much more than I was expecting. That Christmas I got a wonderful surprise.

This morning we come to the third in our series ALIVE AGAIN - the Resurrection in Acts and our theme this morning "Resurrection Surprise". When the apostles saw the risen Christ they got so much more than they were expecting. They were truly surprised.

When you read the Book of Acts as a whole, one of the things that really stands out is the witness of the apostles to the resurrection of Christ. In the early preaching of the gospel this was the most prominent theme. And you can understand it because for the apostles this was such a surprise.

At the cross they thought their leader had been executed and the show was all over. They were ready to go back to their fishing nets. But then on the third day
-they discover an empty tomb,
-they meet again with the risen Lord who re inspires them with the Gospel vision.

There is no way they could have cooked up this story because it was the last thing they were expecting. It really does have a ring of authenticity about it. For them it was a complete surprise.

So we come to our story in Acts chapter 3. I hope it might be familiar to you. The back story is in verses 1 to 10. Peter and John have encountered this lame man begging at the Temple.

The beggar looks to the apostles for some money but Peter says in v6, "*Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth walk.*" And guess what he jumps to his feet and walks. Not only that he is jumping and leaping and praising God around the Temple. [Youth Fellowship song]

This chap was a regular feature of the Temple. We're told, every day he was carried to the Temple gate called 'Beautiful'. Everyone knew him as a cripple, so when they see him healed and so strong in his legs, in v10 we're told they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. As we might expect they were surprised.

Then in the passage we read from v11 we read again the people were astonished and gather around Peter and John and start exalting them. Peter's response is, *"Fellow Israelites why does this surprise you?"* And he deflects attention away from him and John as the source of the healing to Jesus. v16
-It is by faith in the name of Jesus that the lame man has been made strong.
-It is the faith that comes through Jesus that has completely healed this man.

There is a strong contrast drawn here between
-what human beings have done which is not surprising and
-what God has done which is surprising.

V13b

-You handed him over to be killed,
-you disowned him before Pilate,
-you disowned the holy and righteous one and asked for a murderer to be released,
-you killed the author of life

-None of this is surprising really when you think that Jesus challenged people to give him their full allegiance and their only allegiance to Him.
-And not surprising when you think how easily people can be manipulated, and of course were, by the Pharisees and Jewish leaders.
-And it is not surprising that people get jealous and covet other people's popularity. Hence the Jewish leader's plot to get rid of Jesus.

None of this is surprising that they wanted to crucify Jesus.

But what is surprising is what we find in the second part of verse 15.
"But God raised him from the dead."

-Human beings did their worst but God did his best.
-Human beings thought they could control events but it was God who was in control.
God has the final say over sin and death.

Jesus death and resurrection, in fact, should not have been surprising. This was simply fulfilling what God had already foretold through the prophets saying that the Messiah would suffer. [v17]

And the prophets he names are

V22 Moses

V24 Samuel and

V25 Abraham

Firstly, Moses v22, Peter quotes Deuteronomy 18:15 where Moses says to the people, *"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people."*

So make no mistake Moses pointed people to Jesus. The Jewish leaders should have known Moses, and should have picked up that Jesus was the prophet Moses referred to.

The next prophet Peter points to is Samuel [v24]. We're not given any detail here about how Samuel points to Jesus. Samuel was the prophet who anointed Israel's first 2 Kings Saul and David. This of course was pointing to Jesus as King but that is not explicitly drawn out in this text.

Finally there is a reference to Abraham [v25] and God's promise to him that *"Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed."* Genesis 12: 3. This verse sets the structure for the whole of the Biblical story. Abraham is the start of the Israelite nation,
-the nation through whom God will accomplish his saving purposes,
-the nation through whom he will send his Messiah Jesus,
-a Messiah who will indeed be for all peoples on earth,
-a Messiah for all nations.

Now, Peter is doing a lot more here than just quoting a few random proof-texts from the Old testament. He is looking at the Old Testament as a single great story which was constantly pointing forwards to something that God was going to do - through Abraham and his family; something that Moses, Samuel and the rest of the prophets were pointing to as well. This great something was the restoration of all things, a time when everything would be put right at last.

And now Peter is saying it's happened!
It's happened in Jesus!
And you can be part of it.

I find it really interesting that Peter doesn't lambast his fellow Israelites or the Jewish leaders. In verse 17 he is actually very kind to them in suggesting that they acted in ignorance, just as their leaders did.

The reason he can think like this is that his mind is on the overall plan of God, the good news plan to save the world through Jesus. So his concern is not to send the Israelites on a guilt trip for what they've done to Jesus, but simply to invite them into the new thing God is doing through Jesus.

V19 is the invitation, *"Repent, then, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."*

So Peter is inviting his Jewish listeners to accept the surprising reversal God has accomplished. They did their worst, God did his best and they now have the opportunity to repent and believe in Jesus and enter into God's salvation, God's refreshment.

At this point in the book of Acts the message is just for the Jews and especially those directly responsible for Jesus' death, but the hint is here especially through quoting Genesis 12:3 and the promise to Abraham, that God's new thing, God's surprising thing will be for all nations.

And of course that means us. We are the Gentiles, the nations who are now also included.

And you know what, We should be surprised,
But are we???

There are many people in our society who have very relaxed view about God. Maybe they're not sure if there is a God but if there is he should be a very loving forgiving God who knows how tough it is for us human beings here on earth and who should accept me in the end because I've tried my best and at least I'm not as bad as some other people.

Now the problem is not that some people think this way but that this type of thinking can seep into the church. This type of thinking is not the God of Jesus Christ or the God the apostles preached in Acts. In the New Testament people don't expect forgiveness as a matter of their rights, they come to forgiveness with utter surprise that the Holy Creator God should even consider forgiving them.

In Acts 3 Peter tells the crowd that day in Solomon's Colonnade in the Temple,
-they handed Jesus over to be killed
-they disowned him before Pilate
-they rejected the holy and righteous one and asked for a murderer to be released instead and
-they killed the author of life,
but surprise, surprise despite all this God raised Jesus from the dead and offers them forgiveness. All they have to do is repent and turn to God and he'll accept them. There is a sense of amazement and astonishment here that God can forgive such sinners.

Now you might say that you weren't in that first century crowd that called for Jesus' crucifixion and that of course is true. But the Bible does say that it is human sin which put Jesus on the cross. It is the sin of humanity which made the cross necessary.
And that includes your sin and my sin.

Can I ask you, do you just expect that God should forgive you? or are you surprised, amazed even, that he should make a way to forgive you through Jesus' death and resurrection.
When we gaze at the cross, and look at the empty tomb, we should be amazed.
And that should lead to repentance.

You see if you think you deserve forgiveness then you don't need to repent do you.
But if you know you have a sinful heart that doesn't pursue God like you know you should, then you will look only to Jesus and what he did in his death and resurrection. That's what it means to repent.

So I want to encourage you this morning to read the Acts of the Apostles with fresh eyes. Read it through the eyes of the apostles and their amazement that Jesus had died on the cross for their sins and come alive again.

And that this had equipped them for a ministry of preaching and healing and care for the poor and all that we read about in Acts.

Catch especially the excitement they have of being witnesses to his resurrection - the surprise they felt when they saw him risen from the dead.

The surprise Peter must have felt preaching to a large crowd on the Day of Pentecost to over 3000 people.
And then preaching to what must have been another large group of people in the Temple that day when he healed the lame man.

Most importantly capture the excitement of responding yourself to the apostles' preaching.
-Be surprised that you are part of the new world that God promised through the prophets, which is now fulfilled in Jesus.
-Be surprised that God can forgive even your sin and give you a new resurrection life in Jesus.