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*The Unstoppable Church*

## **The Life-Changing Power of Jesus**

**Acts 3:1 - 4:4**

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### ***Life in the Loop Video:***

Testimony from Gus: *I was always pretty distant from my father, even when I was a young kid. He was pretty stern and tended to use corporal punishment quite a bit. My mom, on the other hand, was kind of the polar opposite. She was always happy, but very shallow and somewhat distracted and not really there. So I was kind of caught in a world of two parents who were more like shifting sand than anything. I was full of conflict because I was starting to become very resentful.*

*One of my friends thought that he could influence his dad, and he decided to stop talking to his dad. His dad noticed that. I wanted my dad to notice me, so I tried that. The thing was, I stopped talking to my dad, and my dad never noticed. He never seemed to care that I stopped talking to him. That was in sixth grade.*

*One time I was working with my dad. He had asked me to take some corn back to the barn. We had some horses. On the way, I was in my own little world. I was ripping the kernels off the cob. I think my dad saw what I was doing. The next thing I knew, I was in the barn and my dad had a pitchfork. He started to beat me with the pitchfork. That was the first time I felt like my dad really could have killed me. I don't know if he was trying to do that, but I was terrified of him. Gradually we got so distant that I would avoid him at all times. I would get up before he got up, eat, and then go back upstairs when he came down to eat. So I had my schedule almost a complete opposite as I could from him.*

*My relationship with my dad—it really formed the type of relationship I had with God. There was always this undercurrent of “I don't trust God.” I did not trust him. If I did something wrong, he was going to get me back. I had become so willful and so full of fear and so full of hatred that my life started to take a life of its own. I destroyed relationship after relationship very similarly. If somebody made me mad or scared me, I cut them out of my life. I felt a gulf, a really big gulf, between me and the world. That was a constant feeling. I would get relief from that through sex and through alcohol and through the fantasy world—a world I could escape to. I would rather deal with the world through sex than anything else.*

*The problem was, it was isolating me from the world. It really wasn't helping me connect. There was always an inevitable feeling at the end of my day: “I have no purpose; I have no plan for my life; nobody really cares about my life.”*

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Where you work, where you live, where you go to school—you are surrounded by people very much like Gus. Oh, some people hide it better than others. But a lot of people are struggling with feelings of emptiness and despair, wondering what gives life meaning. Some people like Gus turn to alcohol or sex. Some people turn to success and money and material things. A lot of people turn to religion.

There are those who would tell you that religion is an invention of man to give some way to cope with the emptiness and meaninglessness of life. To some degree, that is true. In many ways, religion is a construct of man where we define our own way to God. We define God in our own terms in such a way that God does not interfere much with our lives, but He is there for the crisis moments of life.

The question we want to wrestle with this morning is: Does religion have the power to change a life like Gus? The answer is no, it does not. All religion has to offer is to cause a miserable life to be just a little bit less miserable.

Turn with me to Acts chapter 3, as we try to understand the dramatic difference between Jesus and religion. Nobody knows for sure how much time passed between the events of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3. It was probably a relatively short period of time. Chapter 3:1:

**Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple, which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms.**

(Acts 3:1-3, \*NASB)

You have to understand the setting here to appreciate this story. The temple was the focal point of the Jewish religion. It was the centerpiece of power. The Jewish people were a highly religious people, and the temple was the hub. They prayed at 9:00 in the morning, at 12:00 noon, at 3:00 in the afternoon. This was the 3:00 in the afternoon prayer time. This immediately preceded the evening sacrifices, so by an overwhelming margin this would have been the most highly attended of the prayer times. We're talking about thousands and thousands and thousands of people flooding through the gates through this magnificent structure called the temple.

It was a magnificent structure. Just this gate, which is probably the East gate, would have been covered with bronze. It was a huge, mammoth gate. Everything about the temple was to communicate power—the power of religion. Only a few hundred feet away was the very place where they believed God's presence dwelt.

The verb tenses would tell us that this man's trip to the East gate was not something he did occasionally. This was something he did *daily*. Day after day after day, people would carry him to this gate in order that he might be there when these religious people were streaming through the gate to get enough money to survive another day.

Over the years, all religion had to offer this man was to make it possible for his misery to be just a little bit less miserable. Religious people were probably a little bit more kind, a little bit more compassionate, a little bit more giving, a little bit more generous. But at the end of the day, all religion could offer him was the ability to survive one more day.

Peter and John are headed through the gate in order to enter into this prayer time, when the lame beggar spots them and appeals to them, like he does to everyone else, for a gift.

**But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, "Look at us." (v. 4)**

That's a very important phrase here, because what is happening is the lame beggar is working the crowd. These beggars over time became very good at what they did. They learned to read people and they learned to work the crowd. The beggar would have a short window of opportunity when these people were streaming through the gate to make his appeal and gather whatever he could gather to survive another day.

In that environment, you can't really afford to fix your eye contact on someone. You've got to work the crowd. So you can imagine the beggar made eye contact with them, which was enough to say, "Can you please help me?" and then to the next, and to the next, and to the next. What Peter and John are in essence saying is, "What we are about to give you is different than what religion has given you your whole life. As a matter of fact, what we're about to give you is going to meet your every need. You'll never again need to do what you're doing."

What they want from this man is to stop looking around. “You’re never again going to need any of this. We’re going to give you everything you need and meet your every need.” The statement “Look at us” is a way of saying, “We’re about to give you everything you need. Stop looking around.”

**And he began to give them his attention expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, “I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!” And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God; and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.** (vs. 5-10)

Peter says to the lame beggar, “I don’t have silver and gold to give you, but what I do have I am going to give you. In the name of Jesus...” Anytime the Scriptures talk about the “name” it’s the sum total of that person. Peter is saying, “In the name of who Jesus is and what He has done, rise up and walk.”

It’s very important to remind ourselves that the historian here is Luke, who is a medical doctor. Several of the terms used in this text are very precise medical terms. For example, when Luke is talking about feet and ankles, he uses two words that are very unique, very specialized. This is the only time these two words show up in the Scriptures. They’re medical terms to describe the deformity, the problem with the feet and the ankles.

When he talks about the man leaping up, it’s a medical term that basically means for the sockets to fall back into place where they belong. It’s probably why Luke continues to repeat the word “walking,” because as a medical doctor he understood what the physical problem was. It was a problem from birth. He understood the physical issues, and he understood what was necessary for this man to walk again. In amazement, he is recording this story that this man with those problems is now able to walk. “Walking...walking...walking”—he keeps repeating it.

It’s a beautiful picture when Peter reaches down and takes the man’s hand and lifts him to his feet. It is the power of Jesus, but it is the hand of Peter—which is a beautiful picture of the mission that we’re called to. It is the life-changing power of Jesus, but it flows through His people. It is our hands and feet that touch the people around us that introduces them to the new life in Jesus.

This man suddenly stands and is running and leaping and praising God. The crowd there recognizes him as the one who has been at the gate begging year after year after year. Suddenly, in amazement and wonder, he is able to walk.

**While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement.** (v. 11)

That word “clinging” is an interesting word. Most of the time in the New Testament it is translated “arrested.” It would be used to describe when anyone of an official capacity arrested somebody else. Imagine an officer of the law arresting someone. You don’t just gently hold them. You cling to them. You grab hold. That’s the word.

You get the impression that this lame beggar didn’t really understand quite what happened here. He was asking for money; he got a new life. He knew that for his lifetime, religion had offered

him very little. But now suddenly in the name of Jesus, he had what he never could have imagined. It came through these two men. All he knew was: “I am going to cling to these men. I will not let them go.” That’s the picture of verse 11.

It also tells us that the people came running in amazement. We’re talking about thousands of people. We’ll see in chapter 4 that there were thousands and thousands of people gathered here that came running from all over the courtyard. I think sometimes we read these miracles in the Bible and we think people got so used to them it was like, “Oh, look, another miracle. Let’s stroll over there and see what happened.” But that’s not true. These people were astonished by this, so much so that they ran. Suddenly there are thousands of people gathered together to understand what has just transpired.

**But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, “Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk?”** (v. 12)

These people had come flocking together as a crowd, and Peter speaks to them. First, he says, “Why are you amazed at this?” In other words, “Jesus has been doing these miracles for three years. He is resurrected from the dead. Why should this shock you? But second of all, don’t look at us as if by our religion and our piety somehow we pulled this off.”

Immediately Peter and John are deflecting the glory back to Jesus where it belonged. What a contrast to the religious power brokers of our day, who seek to convince us that they have some power of God that is their own that they dispense to you. They create environments that are very self-glorifying. They ride around in limousines. They stay in affluent hotels. Everything says that they are the ones in the spotlight.

The contrast to that is Peter and John immediately said, “This isn’t us. This isn’t our religion. This is the power of Jesus that has healed this man.”

**“The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses.”**  
(vs. 13-15)

In order to understand this discussion, it’s very important to recognize that Peter is talking to very religious people. He immediately identifies the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, because this particular group of people would have quickly affirmed their belief in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They believed the Old Testament Scriptures. Many of these people would have had the Scriptures memorized—the entire Old Testament. These were highly religious people. If we were to draw a comparison to our world today, we would say these are people who embrace the Judeo-Christian belief. If you talk about Easter or if you talk about Christmas, they would quickly say, “We believe that.” If you talk about the Bible, they would say, “We believe that.” These are people that go to church. They give some sort of intellectual assent to the basic message.

One of the benefits of this particular text—we might call it a secondary application—is that Peter gives us a very workable strategy for how to reach the religious people in our world. If you have tried to share the gospel much, one thing you’ve learned quickly is that religious people are the hardest people to reach. Oftentimes when we’re sharing our faith, we find ourselves chomping at the bit for a true pagan, because they are the most responsive. They recognize they’re lost.

They're needy; they're looking for a solution. It's the religious person that is really hard to reach, because the religious person feels like, *You know what? I've got that area of my life together. I go to church. I believe in Christmas and Easter. I believe the message. Everything is okay there.* They really have no need in that area of their lives.

Well, that's very similar to the crowd of people that Peter was talking to. He affirms the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They say, "Yes, that's our God." "Well, He is the God who has glorified Jesus." In other words, it's that God who put His stamp of approval on Jesus and said, "This is the Messiah. This is the Savior. This is My Son. There is life through His resurrection and ascension." So if they really believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they have a problem—because that God put His finger on Jesus and said, "This is the Savior."

Peter is not pulling any punches here. He says, "This was the Holy One. This was the Righteous One. You rejected Him. You disowned Him. Even pagan Pilate examined Him and found no fault in Him and wanted to release Him, but you insisted that He be put to death." He goes so far as to say, "You actually asked for the release of a known murderer so that you could execute the Prince of life." That's what religion had done to these people's perspective. They had lost their way. He concludes it by reminding them that Jesus had indeed been resurrected from the dead. He says, "You know that's true. We're witnesses to this."

We talked about this a couple of weeks ago. I'm convinced one of the reasons that thousands and thousands and thousands of people initially came to Christ was because the evidence was overwhelming that the tomb was empty. Peter keeps going back to that. This is the place where the tomb was. If Jesus had not been resurrected from the dead, all they had to do was walk over to the tomb and prove that. But what was so evident was the opposite. The tomb was empty. The resurrected Jesus had appeared to over 500 of them. They were backed into a corner. They had to acknowledge, *This is true.*

**"And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man, whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all."** (v. 16)

Peter says, "This is a man you know. This is a man you've seen." Everybody knew his problem, so Peter says, "Look at him now. He is running. He is jumping. He is praising God." Again, they were backed into a corner. What could they say? Something happened. Peter is saying, "This was through faith in Jesus." He is not talking about the lame beggar's faith in Jesus. I don't think the lame beggar quite understood what was going on. He was talking about Peter and John and their faith in Jesus as their Savior and Messiah. The power of Jesus was flowing through them, restoring this man to perfect health. Of course, that's just a picture of the potential of the power of Jesus to give us life.

**"And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also."** (v. 17)

That's an interesting statement, isn't it? Peter is not saying that they are off the hook because they are ignorant. As a matter of fact, twice now he has pointed the finger at them and said, "You people did this. You're responsible." What he is saying is that these people aren't God-haters. These are highly religious people, who somewhere along the way have gotten way off track. But these are people who want to please the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These are people who want to do the right thing.

They would be very much like the religious people in our lives. All of us know highly religious people who are kind, generous, gentle, loving, salt of the earth type people. They would do anything for you. They go to church every weekend. They may even give their money. They may even teach a Sunday School class. But the reality is they just don't get it. They're not wanting to be God-haters. They're not thumbing their nose at God. They're just off-track. They haven't understood the truth. That's what Peter is talking about.

He is going to go on and say, "But you should have understood the truth, because the Old Testament prophets told you exactly what would happen." If it's true that they really affirm the Old Testament Scriptures, then they should go back and read them, because they clearly identify exactly what would transpire.

**"But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled." (v. 18)**

We talked about this two weeks ago. It was a great stumbling block to the Jewish people that their Messiah suffered and died, and even more offensive that He died a criminal's death on a cross. Their longing had caused them to create a theology where they believed that when the Messiah came, the Messiah would establish a kingdom and would reign on earth and they would have their covenant kingdom restored to order. In their theology, there was no room for a Messiah who would suffer and be executed. Yet Peter goes back to the Scriptures and says, "It was right there all along, if you would have just read the prophets. The prophets said He would suffer and die as the Messiah."

**"Therefore [in light of that] repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away..." (v. 19a)**

"Repent"—that's the same word we looked at last week. It means to change your mind, to change your thinking, to change your heart. They had to change their thinking about themselves and recognize that religion can't make them self-righteous. They had to change their mind about their need for a Savior. They had to change their mind about Jesus and who He was and what He had done.

Last week we wrestled with chapter 2 verse 38, where it kind of sounded like baptism was necessary for the forgiveness of sins. We unpacked the words and concluded that a better translation would be "Repent and be baptized *because* of the forgiveness of your sins." Baptism isn't a means of forgiveness; it is a declaration of forgiveness. Now in chapter 3, that belief is affirmed again when Peter declares to them the message of salvation. Baptism is not even mentioned, but repentance is mentioned again. "Repent and believe. Repent and return. Come back to the God of the covenant. Come back to God and enter into a relationship with Him."

**"Repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away."** It's an interesting phrase there: "wiped away." In the first century, they wrote on papyrus. They wrote with an ink that had little or no acid content, which basically meant it didn't have much staying power. You could take a rag and you could just wipe it across the papyrus and you would clear everything off. That's this phrase. It's basically a picture that your sins are written on a document, but if you repent and return, God takes this rag and wipes the document clean and there is no longer evidence of that sin. Even if your sin was rejecting and crucifying the Messiah, all you have to do is ask and God will wipe the document clean as if you had never sinned.

**". . . wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven**

**must receive until the period of restoration of all things, about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.”** (v. 19b-21)

Here we get into a little bit of end times theology. As you're probably aware, any time we do so, there are quite a variety of opinions. But what everybody pretty much agrees with is what is being referred to here as the second coming of Jesus. When Jesus comes, it will be a period of restoration. It will be a period of Jesus setting up His kingdom and establishing His kingdom on earth. Right now Jesus is in heaven and He is held there. He is awaiting that day. So it's a time of refreshing that is yet to come. But we enter into that to some degree when we repent and have our sins forgiven.

This idea of a restored kingdom is not new. As a matter of fact, it comes up all the time in the Gospels. It came up in Acts 1:6 when the apostles asked Jesus, "Is it time now for the restoration of the kingdom?" You remember Jesus didn't say to them, "That's not going to happen." Jesus just said, "That's My business. Let Me worry about the timing of that. You need to be focused on the mission." There is yet a time when Jesus will return and will establish a kingdom. It will be everything that those people longed for. The time is just not now.

The problem with their theology is they had a gap. The gap was understanding the suffering, death, burial and resurrection of the Messiah and how they must respond to it. What they longed for was a day when the kingdom would be restored and the Messiah would reign and they would once again have this life that we refer to as the millennial kingdom—a time when the prophets said the lion will lay down with the lamb. It will be a remarkable time.

But in their theology, they had missed the part that the Messiah must die, that He must suffer, and that they must embrace Him as Savior in order to one day experience that kingdom. It's the very same mistake that religious people make today. Religious people like to talk about heaven. When somebody dies, they really like to talk about heaven. They affirm the message of Easter and Christmas. What they want is for Jesus to make everything okay. But somewhere along the way, they've missed the middle part. The middle part is that en route you have to realize you are a sinner and you are in need of a Savior. You must personally make a decision to embrace that—to embrace the person and work of Jesus in order to experience that heaven that we long for.

That's exactly what Peter is going to talk about in verse 22.

**“Moses said, ‘THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to everything He says to you. And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.’ ”**

In Deuteronomy 18 Moses says there will be another prophet. Moses is prophesying about the Messiah. When He comes, He will declare the message to you. All those who are unwilling to listen, who are unwilling to embrace His message will be utterly destroyed. In other words, those who do not embrace the Messiah have no chance of this restored kingdom yet to come.

I realize we live in a culture that promotes the idea that all religions, all roads, lead to heaven—that ultimately they all lead to the same God. I realize in our country everybody has the freedom to believe what they want, and they will live with the consequences of their beliefs. But if you believe in the authority of the Scriptures, you cannot believe that all religions lead to God. The Bible is exclusive from cover to cover. The Bible clearly says there is one way to God, and that is through Jesus Christ, God's Son. Again, this text declares that. Those who do not embrace Jesus as Savior have no hope of that future kingdom. They will be utterly destroyed from the covenant.

**“And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days [*the days they were living in, the days of Jesus*]. It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.’ For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.”** (v. 24-26)

Peter is saying to this Jewish audience, “You are the people of the covenant. You are the children of Abraham. You are the children of the prophets. If there is anybody that should know this, it should be you. The promise was always made that this message would go to you first.” So Peter is saying, “That’s exactly what is happening. It is being declared to you.” The promise was made to Abraham that through the seed of Abraham every family on the earth would be blessed. The offer is made to them first—that God’s blessing awaits them, if they’re willing to believe and receive the Savior. Jesus will turn them from their wicked ways. Peter says, “From Samuel on, this is what the prophets talked about. It is the fulfillment of Scripture.” He is saying to them, “As a highly religious people, you should have known this.”

Just to give you some idea of how amazing the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies were in the life of Jesus, most scholars would identify somewhere around 60 major prophecies about Jesus as the Messiah. We can identify that all of these were written hundreds of years before Jesus came on the scene. The question would be: What is the possibility that Jesus could have simply by chance fulfilled all 60 of those prophecies perfectly?

Well, a mathematician set out to determine that. Many of the prophecies were completely out of Jesus’ control. He picked eight, and he applied the science of mathematics and probability to those eight prophecies. What is the chance that just eight of those could have been perfectly fulfilled by Jesus? He ran the numbers and concluded the odds were one in ten to the seventeenth power. Now that’s a ten with seventeen zeroes on the other end of it. If you’d like me to illustrate one in ten to the seventeenth power, if you took ten to the seventeenth power worth of silver dollars, they would cover the entire state of Texas two feet deep, border to border. Then imagine one of those coins has a red X on it. Then imagine that we were to blindfold you, put you in a helicopter, fly you over the state of Texas and drop you at random. You reach into that pile of silver dollars and pull up the one with the red X. That’s your chance—one in ten to the seventeenth power—that Jesus just fulfilled eight of the prophecies by chance. He then expanded that to 48 of the prophecies. His number was one in ten to the 157th power. That’s 157 zeroes—I’m not even going to try and illustrate that. He couldn’t even calculate the possibilities of Jesus fulfilling all 60 of the prophecies by chance.

That is the exact point Peter was making to these religious Jews: “The evidence is there; read your own Scriptures.” Jesus fulfilled the prophecies perfectly, which means there can only be one conclusion: He had to be the fulfillment of the plan of salvation of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Anytime you present the truth to a religious audience, you’re going to get one of two responses.  
Chapter 4:1:

**As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already**

**evening. But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about 5,000.** (Acts 4:1-4)

There's always going to be one of two responses. There are going to be those who hear it and are so entrenched in their religion that they reject it and they want to silence the messenger. But there will also be those who will hear it, will respond to it and will believe. The religious crowd throws Peter and John in jail, and we'll pick up that part of the story next week.

Two thousand men. Most people think the 5,000 is combined with the 3,000 from chapter 2—so it's now another 2,000 men. And they're only counting men—which was typical in the first century—so when you add women and children to that, it becomes 7-8,000 people easily. This is the last time any numbers are given, because pretty much everybody agrees that the church grew at such a fast rate they could no longer even count the people.

Maybe some of you walked through these doors this morning and deep in your heart you can identify with Gus in the video. You may search for something to fill that void, like Gus was searching, or you may fill it with something else. But deep in your heart, you know something is missing. There is some despair. There is some emptiness. You've thought in your mind, *Maybe a little religion would help*. That's what brings you through the doors this morning. Let me assure you that religion has the power to make your miserable life just a little bit less miserable.

But there is another option: the life-changing power of Jesus, that has the power to radically transform your life forever. If you're willing to acknowledge your own sin, you can believe by faith that God will take a rag and wipe your slate clean as if you've never sinned. On the basis of what Christ was willing to do on the cross in paying for your sin, if you believe that and embrace it and make it your own, you can enter into a life-changing relationship with God.

Sometimes we just get so entrenched in our religion that we stop thinking. We stop pursuing truth. This text also is very helpful for giving us a strategy for how to better reach the religious people in our world. One of the things that we must note is that just living a good life before them will not work. They do the same thing. You follow the rules; they follow the rules. They're really not seeing much of a difference. But what will capture their attention is exactly what caught these people's attention in the first century—and that is a dramatically changed life. Religion simply does not have the power to do that.

A life that has been dramatically changed through the power of Jesus is unexplainable. You can't just dismiss it. Something happened here. Tell your own story. Tell your own story about how God has dramatically transformed your life. Tell the story of other people, especially other people they may know, and how their lives have been dramatically changed by the power of the gospel. We try to present those stories to you on a regular basis here.

The second thing is that people who are within the framework of the Judeo-Christian value system still have a very high view of the Scriptures. They may not have any idea what's really in it. They may not even know how to begin to defend what they believe out of the Scriptures, but they still think the Bible is a good book, an important book. One of the things you can do with highly religious people is just what Peter did. Begin to open up the Scriptures and let them see for themselves: "This is clearly and plainly the message of the Bible."

There may be many things in the Bible you can't explain. That's fine. None of us have all the answers. But the message of Jesus is very plain. It's very simple; it's very clear. As they begin to walk through the Scriptures, they will begin to see and understand the truth for themselves. There are many of you who at one time in your lives were highly religious. But you would say you just

didn't get it. You began to open up the Scriptures, you began to read them for yourselves, you began to study them, and you began to realize what is true. It was then that you chose to give your life to Jesus, and Jesus has radically transformed your life.

When you do that, keep in mind that there will always be those religious people who will reject that. They want to silence the messenger. But there will also always be those who will hear and respond and will experience for themselves the life-changing power of Jesus.

*Our Father, we're thankful that You are a faithful God. Lord, it seems like if there were ever a group of people that would have been beyond Your grace, it would have been those religious people in the first century that were responsible for the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus. Yet Lord, clearly we are told over and over again, if they're willing to repent and believe, their sins are forgiven, and they experience the life-changing power of Jesus. Lord, if there are any here that maybe have been highly religious but have never really known a personal relationship with Jesus, may this be the day that their sins are forgiven and their lives are touched and changed in a way in which they will never be the same again. In Jesus' name we pray this, Amen*

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### **Conclusion of Video:**

*Gus: One day after just another series of failures, I decided I needed help. So I ended up writing. I always had a bunch of secrets about my life and the things I'd done. I wrote them all down. I really wasn't crazy about telling somebody else, but I knew that if I didn't, these things were going to eat my lunch. I went over to a friend's house and I told him a lot of things I just needed to tell somebody. Something clicked in me that day. Something clicked, and it was not a good click. It was a bad click—it was that I had no ability to stop myself from destroying my life.*

*What had happened was I had tried to run my life. That works for a little bit, but then it stops working and you have to try harder. I felt more desperate and I just hated myself. I started to understand that I was a sinner and I needed someone to pay the debt for my sin. I couldn't do it. I couldn't earn it, and I couldn't overcome my penalty. It made sense.*

*So I sat down and I just asked Jesus to take my will and my life that day and that I would give Him everything. I said, "God, I'm not sure what's going to happen now or where we're going to go or who is going to find out these things, but that's fine. Whatever You want to do with me, please just take care of me." I really felt closer to God. I felt miles and miles closer to God that day than I ever felt in my life. That turned out to be a huge turning point in my life. He was helping me the whole time. I'm pretty grateful for that. I don't understand it completely. It's like I understand Him a lot more.*

*I work with a lot of guys that are the same way I was. They're trying to get desperately back to God. They make a lot of mistakes. I get to sit there and just keep coaxing them and keep helping them to come back. The beggar was a guy that needed help. He wasn't sitting there asking for God. He wanted money. He didn't know what he needed. The apostles came over to him and they brought Him. They said, "We have Jesus Christ and we can give you that."*

*I think that's when the power flows. It's not that I'm holding God, but that I keep giving Him away and He flows through me. And I feel His presence. If you don't think God loves you and is trying desperately to get you back into His life, then your idea is wrong. He has been willing to love me and lead me back to Him and to lead me to a life that is immensely more satisfying than the life I was living. He was doing that while I was despicable, while I was still a vile creature. So I know He is a loving and forgiving God, and a very powerful God. And I am extremely grateful that I have a relationship with Him today.*

\*Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE  
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October 15/16, 2005

**Study Questions**  
*The Unstoppable Church*  
**The Life-Changing Power of Jesus**  
**Acts 3:1 - 4:4**  
Pastor Bryan Clark

### **Opening Discussion**

1. As a group, seek to define “religion.”
2. What distinguishes a relationship with Christ from religion?
3. In what ways can religion be a barrier to truth?

### **Bible Study**

1. Read Acts 3:1-10. The lame beggar was carried daily to the temple, which was the hub of the Jewish religion. What hope did religion have to offer this man?

How did the limitations of religion manifest itself in the beggar’s question to Peter and John in verse 3?

2. Why did Peter and John respond as they did and say, “Look at us!”?

What did they offer that was so dramatically different from the religion of the day?

What can we learn from this that might help us reach highly religious people today?

3. What was the point of the miracle according to Peter in Acts 3:11-16?

Why does religion have such great power to blind people to the obvious truth around them?

Have you ever experienced such blindness? What opened your eyes to the truth?

4. In Acts 3:17-26 Peter makes his case that Jesus was the perfect fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. In what way did these religious people act in ignorance (see verse 17)?

Was Peter saying their ignorance was a valid excuse for their behavior? Why or why not?

How could people who so highly revered the Old Testament Scriptures be so ignorant of the meaning of these Scriptures?

5. Peter’s strategy to reach highly religious people was to clearly identify the power of Jesus to change a life in a way religion could not and to point to the truth of the Scriptures. How does this help us in thinking about how to reach highly religious people in our world?

## **Application**

1. What are some practical ways we can be proactive in seeking to prevent religion from blinding our eyes to the truth?
2. What steps can we take to improve our ability to not just know, but understand and apply the Scriptures?
3. What will be our best strategy for reaching the highly religious people in our lives?