

THE JESUS EFFECT

Rooting Leads to Flourishing | Flourish Series (Part 1) | Text: Acts 4:1-22

Introduction & Scripture Reading

Well, I am so excited to be starting this five-week adventure with you and to know that there are actually now enough PARKING SPACES here for all of us to be part of this conversation! Even if you are joining us via livestream or are visiting Christ Church for the very first time today, this is going to be a terrific season as we mine what God has to teach us through the life of the first followers of Jesus, recorded in the Book of Acts.

As we did with our original TAKE ROOT series a year ago now, we've put together a wonderful [resource booklet](#) designed to be your companion during these next weeks. I encourage you to reach out and take hold of one of these right now, put your name in the space on the back, and plan to bring it with you when you come to worship over this next month. It's got pages for [sermon notes](#), as well as a personal [study guide](#) that will help you personalize what we'll be studying on the weekends and in the small group discussions accompanying this series.

If you're not yet part of a [small group](#), it's not too late. Just stop by the GROW CENTER in the Commons today and we'll help you find one that works for your schedule. It is just a four-week commitment, but an incredibly impactful way to open your life to all that God wants to do in and through you in this year ahead.

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John and... put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed; so the number who believed grew to about five thousand.

The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem... They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this... It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed... For there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus (Acts 4:1-13).

The World as It Should Be

For all the divisions and disputes that rage these days -- from football fields to the halls of congress to the streets of our cities and maybe even your workplace or home -- there is one thing on which everyone seems united. We'd like this world healed. We'd like to see the world AS IT IS change into the world AS IT SHOULD BE.

We all want a world where you can go to a concert or walk to school or get on an airplane never fearing that some hate-filled stranger is going to try to end your life. We all want a world where Hollywood moguls and corporate titans and politicians, pastors, parents, or people in power at any level, use their capacities for the good of those under their care instead of for their own selfish ends. We want a society where, when you are really hungry or sick or terribly alone or unsure how to get out of the mess you are in, somebody reaches out a resourceful hand to help you. We want to live in a nation where people obey the law and its officers, and where those laws are so just and their enforcement so fair that we are all thrilled to our feet at the sight of our flag.

I believe most all of us yearn to live in a land where hard-work, risk, and sacrifice are rewarded and a pattern of laziness, stealing or entitlement are not. We want a world where the people whose generosity leads them to teach our children well, or defend us against harm, are treated as worthy of greater honor than somebody whose genetics makes them able to hit a curveball or woo a camera lens. We'd like to live on a planet where we and the generations that follow us enjoy fresh air and clean water and fertile land. We want a life where others help us get better than we are by speaking the truth to us in love, instead of talking about us behind our backs or writing us off. We yearn for a world where everyone can be trusted with great freedoms because they are morally wise enough to practice self-restraint. No matter our age, color, or background, every one of us would love a life in which we had what it takes to grow a healthier character, family, and community.

In other words: We'd all like to live in a world where the best in us and others will truly FLOURISH – where we don't merely survive but truly thrive. Wouldn't YOU like that? I would. So, how do we get there, especially because it feels like we are going the opposite direction these days? Here's my thesis: The answer to our greatest need and deepest hope is not a policy, product, or program. It's a Person. Rooting our lives more deeply in Christ is the key to helping us FLOURISH.

Moving from Surviving to Thriving

It's hard to overstate the EFFECT Jesus had on the first people who dared to make that investment their greatest priority. Up till the moment Peter and John made the decision to shift from being a mere admirer of Jesus to being an actual follower of Jesus, their existence had been a version of the same treadmill many in our time experience life to be. John and Peter were fishermen. They got up before dawn to go to work. They labored all day at repetitive tasks, went home, ate, fell asleep, then started the cycle again. Some days brought a good catch whose story they'd tell on all those other days when the fishing was lousy. Some days brought storms that terrified them. Most brought mind-numbing monotony. It was a life of surviving but not of thriving.

There were pleasures, of course – the touch of family, conversation with friends, the taste of new wine or a good meal. But the overall picture of their times was not pretty. Most people in Israel lived at the bare subsistence level. The nation was a militarized zone, occupied by Roman soldiers who used and abused Jewish people with impunity. Up to one-third of the population of the Roman world was enslaved. Think about that. A third of the men, women, and children around you were human trafficked. Treatment of women and children was often heinous. Infanticide was high. Rape was commonplace. Education was denied to anyone but men and to precious few of them at that. Life-stealing diseases were rampant. Some zealots kept putting their hope in a political revolution to fix things. Most others had given up the thought that life could be any different. Only a faithful few still prayed that the Messiah might come.

And, then, He did. Peter and John, Mary Magdalene, Salome, and a band of men and women had recognized him. They'd met this young rabbi from Nazareth who kept speaking of **"the Gospel (Good News) of the Kingdom" (Matt 24:14)**. At first, they thought he was talking about a Kingdom in the conventional sense of a political or religious order. But the stories Jesus told about the Kingdom were more about relationships than rules. They were about how you treated your neighbor or your enemy or the stranger along the road. Christ's teachings were about how you managed your pride, anger, lust, money, and a host of other forces that precede and produce a certain kind of world. The disciples started to see that before greater flourishing could happen OUT THERE, a new kind of life had to start IN HERE.

So Peter and John began the slow process of pulling their roots out of the other kingdoms in which they'd been grounded. They started to pull away from the kingdom of looking good and having stuff and getting control and being popular and all the other fickle sources of identity or security people serve. Instead, they sank their roots in the promise of Jesus that God loved them and would always be with them, and had a resurrected future for them, not because they were so good but because He was. Slowly, they became among the most humble and courageous people who ever lived.

One of the promises Jesus had made them was: **"If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit" (John 15:5)**. So the disciples started to adopt daily and weekly practices that helped them stay connected to Christ. They developed rhythms of work and rest, fellowship and study, praise and prayer, gratitude and generosity, like they'd seen Jesus practice. And an amazing thing happened. The Holy Spirit came upon them. The character of Christ grew in them. Peter, John, and the other members of the early church became people of greater and greater **"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control" (Gal 5:22-23)**. As they rooted themselves more deeply in Christ, they not only flourished personally; they became a phenomenal force for flourishing in the lives of other people.

Having Been with Jesus

We get only a tiny glimpse of this in the text we read earlier from Acts chapter 4, but it's a preview of so much more. Peter and John perform **"an act of kindness" (v.9)** by healing a lame man in the name of Jesus. They go on to proclaim that Christ's

resurrection proves that Jesus possesses a power stronger than sin, disease, or death (v.10). **"There is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (v.12)**. In other words, Jesus is the key to FLOURISHING in the here and now and the ever-after. And we're told that: **"Many who heard the message believed; so the number who believed grew to about five thousand" (v.4)**.

Please note this: The entire Christian movement at this point is no larger than the active membership of Christ Church right now. Yet, what grows out of that first church will go on to revolutionize the Roman Empire and birth a new kind of civilization. Over the years to come, the disciples of Jesus will liberate slaves, lift up women and kids, and minister mercy to countless sick and dying people. The church will expand educational opportunity, inspire scientific inquiry, and catalyze the arts. The Christian message will re-envision power in a way that will make democracy conceivable and implant the ethics that will make capitalism possible. In a nutshell, the Gospel of the Kingdom will be sown across the world and promote the temporal and eternal flourishing of BILLIONS of people. It will reach into this very room where you sit now.

I doubt Peter and John could see all that would come from their decision to root their lives in Christ. On this particular day, they get thrown in jail for that choice. But even their critics are compelled to admit that these disciples are creating more than a ripple and they recognize the reason: **"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus" (v.14)**.

Here are two questions I invite you to ponder between now and when we return in seven days: "What steps can you take to BE with Jesus this week?" He'll be in those small groups out there. He'll be with the poor and hurting people you'll meet. He'll be waiting in the scriptures and in the silence for you. He'll draw very near to you wherever you stoop to serve. And, then, finally: "What will be the evidence others will see that YOU have been with Jesus?" I'll give you a hint: They'll note in your character and your conduct something green and growing. They'll find in you something or a SOMEONE with a greater passion to see the world AS IT IS change into the world AS IT SHOULD BE. They'll meet the power for flourishing in your life. It's the Jesus Effect.