CHAPTER 4

4: 5 The next day the council of all the rulers and elders and teachers of religious law met in Jerusalem. 6 Annas the high priest was there, along with Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and other relatives of the high priest. 7 They brought in the two disciples and demanded, “By what power, or in whose name, have you done this?”

8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Leaders and elders of our nation, 9 are we being questioned because we’ve done a good deed for a crippled man? Do you want to know how he was healed? 10 Let me clearly state to you and to all the people of Israel that he was healed in the name and power of Jesus Christ from Nazareth, the man you crucified, but whom God raised from the dead. 11 For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says,

‘The stone that you builders rejected

has now become the cornerstone.’\*

12 There is salvation in no one else! There is no other name in all of heaven for people to call on to save them.”

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If any of you have taken part in the Alpha course you will have heard of the great Blondini. In the days before TV and the internet, he drew in the crowds with his astonishing feats of tightrope walking, where he would walk backwards, blindfold, and on one occasion pushing a wheelbarrow. Oh, and did I mention, he did this over Niagara Falls?

It was little short of miraculous- at least that’s the way the news reports of the day hyped up his act. Everybody loved him; everybody believed him to be the best of the best of the best. Until one day, he asked if someone would sit in the wheelbarrow while he pushed them across the tightrope, high above Niagara Falls…

Everybody loves a miracle- until the stakes become too high. Until the miracle challenges your world, upsets your securities, and demands that you change the way you live and in particular, who you put your trust in.

John and Peter have carried out an astonishing miracle, in healing a lame man well known to those who frequented the temple in Jerusalem.

This has got people very excited. After all, a miraculous healing of a man crippled since birth, what’s not to like? But carrying out a miracle isn’t enough for John and Peter- they are now inviting all who have witnessed this astonish feat, to climb into the wheelbarrow, as it were, and let themselves be taken across a chasm that they will never be able to cross on their own.

But climbing into the wheelbarrow is exactly the problem. Because to do so means to stop living life your way and to start living it God’s way. For those who are interrogating John and Peter, it will involve admitting they were wrong to reject Jesus and to connive in his killing. For people today it will mean a great awaking to the fact that you can’t have the good life without a God life, that however satisfying and successful this life is, it has a shelf-life, and that the good life of most of us in the west at least comes at the cost of the exploitation of others living in far poorer and more oppressed parts of our world: (so why are we going along with it?)

Peter and John are in trouble, not because of a miracle but because of a message that comes with the miracle. But without the message there cannot be the miracle that matters, the miracle of meeting with the risen Saviour, the miracle of being born from above, the miracle of adoption into the Easter People God has brought into being through the Easter events.

Peter and John have made it crystal clear that they have healed in the name of Jesus, which means with his authority, with his power and in recognition of his sovereignty over their lives.

It’s not the good deed as such that has upset the rulers so much. It’s the message that goes with it that is causing such a stir. And the message is quite clear: Jesus is Lord and Jesus must be followed. Jesus is Lord, and so all other powers and authorities must submit to him. Jesus is Lord, and anyone who has thought differently, or does think differently, needs to change their ways, change their loyalties and change their way of life accordingly. They need to stop trying to cross the chasm under their own steam; they need to get in the wheelbarrow, at let the risen Christ take them across.

Such a message is always going to get God’s people into trouble, one way or another. Because the stakes are so high. Deep down inside, people don’t want God to be in charge, even if they might welcome the occasional miracle.

So they will come up with all sorts of reasons for not getting in the barrow, ranging from: there is no chasm, to: their’s no-one to push the barrow, to: you lot are very narrow minded if you think their’s only one barrow, to …. well, you fill in the blanks.

And let’s be quite clear; most people in our community are inoculated against religion and are allergic to putting their lives in God’s hands.

Which is why we need a miracle. Or rather, it’s why we need a number of miracles.

First, I do believe we should pray for the miraculous ministries we see in the book of Acts. This is the least important sort of miracle needed today, but it tends to be a bit of a crowd puller, and it can certainly make a difference to the person who is healed. But in itself it won’t be enough.

Think about it. Everyone Jesus healed is dead. However miraculous the healing it was a postponement of, not a dealing with death. What’s more, even genuine miracles today will invite the charge of trickery in today’s cynical world, not least because there have been those, claiming to follow Jesus, who have made a living faking healing miracles.

Second, God’s people need a miracle, the sort of miracle that changed Peter from being a Jesus denier to a fearless witness to Jesus risen, Jesus glorified and Jesus enthroned. We need the miracle of a reignited zeal, a Spirit fuelled confidence that we are the light of the world, that our stories matter, and that our witness brings about life saving change.

So like Peter, we need to be filled with the Spirit, and we need to go on being filled with the Spirit. For it is by the Spirit that we find our courage to stand up and stand out for Jesus.`

And thirdly, we need the most important miracle of all: the miracle of meeting, the close encounter with the risen Jesus that will change the lives of everyone who experiences him.

And it will take a miracle. Because people don’t become Christians without the work of the Spirit, the ‘born from above’ ness that Jesus stressed to Nicodemus was the vital but humanly impossible experience that all human beings need.

I believe we need all three sorts of miracle if we are going to see those we love signing up for Easter World. And all three sorts of miracles involve us being open to, and channels of, the love of God.

Peter and John knew this. It was love for Jesus and the love of Jesus that enabled them to be the miracle makers that led to a man being healed.

It was love for Jesus and the love of Jesus that made them bold enough to speak about Jesus to a hostile audience.

And it was love for Jesus and the love of Jesus that led to some at least seeing the light and getting in the wheelbarrow.

Later on in the passage we are told that the council were astonished at the boldness of John and Peter, because they were ordinary men. But they also recognised that they had been with Jesus. We are ordinary people called to follow an extraordinary God; will people say the same of us as the said of Peter and John? They will, if we are willing to pray for, be open to and be the means of the three sorts of miracle I have described. Amen.

https://youtu.be/uU9OWTj-tok