



Expansion: The Story of the Early Church (Part 8) – The Eternal Wow

Jason Harris – 26 September, 2021

Alright, good morning. Good to see everyone here. I trust you had a good week. Let's go ahead and go to the Lord in prayer as we begin this morning. And then we'll go to the word.

Father, thank you for the opportunity to come together before your word. Thank you for Luke in his ministry of recording the history of the early church. I pray that our time considering this history this morning will be beneficial. I pray that our hearts would be drawn to gladness and to worship. We ask for your supernatural help and by your Holy Spirit this morning. In Jesus name. Amen.

Alright, last week we looked at an incident in the temple where Peter and John healed a lame guy at the entrance to the temple. And we noted in verse 10, several things that happened in response to that. The first one was that the Jewish people had “awe”. And the second one is “astonishment”. In your ESV, the words are “wonder” and “amazement”. We then went on in verse 11 and saw again that the people were described as utterly astounded. And we summarized this response to the healing of this guy as these Jewish onlookers saying, “Wow! Wow, that's amazing!”

If I could boil this, this “wow” down for us... It's surprise, but it's not just surprise. Some... we can say “wow” and just mean, “wow, that's surprising,” but this “wow” was a wow of surprised delight. “This is amazing. This guy has been sitting here crippled for years and now he's dancing in the temple. Wow!” And I said last week, that in that word “wow” lies a world of Christian theology. And today I want to take a step further than that and say that in that word “wow” lies the very heart and soul of Christian theology. I just want to take us through and show us how this “wow” is the very core of the Christian faith. Let me show you.

First of all, we talk about God. God before anything else was, is. God always has been, is now, and always will be delighted in himself. He's just really glad to be him. There's nothing about himself that he would change. Nothing. And so the only thing that keeps God from this "wow" is his total incapacity to be surprised by anything. Right. So he's got the delight is complete. It's infinite and perfect. He just can't possibly be surprised by anything. So then we get the creation of mankind. God makes mankind to be eternally delighted in himself. The Westminster catechism refers to this as, "that we exist... the chief end of man is to enjoy God forever." Right? And so mankind is not like God in his infinity. Mankind has this nonstop susceptibility to being surprised. Um, we're constantly surprised. And so mankind was made to exist in eternal, "wow!" It's not just that, "wow" and then we got that and we move on. It's that from now until eternity, we will constantly continue to be not just delighted in God, but surprised by him. We will keep knowing new things about him. He is infinite in his glories, infinite in his perfections. We will discover new depths, new angles forever. We will never ever wrap our finite brains around the infinity of who God is. Ever. This is... we're just supposed to keep being surprisingly delighted by God. It never gets boring. Like, "I'm delighted, but same old thing." It's just going to keep being exciting to get to know God more. So that is what we were created for: This eternal wow. And then we come to redemption. Unfortunately that didn't work out like it was supposed to. Mankind rebelled against God and in doing so blinded himself to the eternally, surprising beauty of God.

And here begins the story of redemption when God in Eden says, "one of your children will redeem you, will restore you to the eternal wow in God." And then over the following millennia, we see God doing just that. He starts with Abraham and then Moses and then David. And eventually we get to the Christ, Jesus, who restores us to the eternal wow that we were created to experience. And what we see in our text today is a wow. Wow! That's amazing! But it is not an eternal wow. In fact, it is pointedly not eternal. This is not the wow of people delighting in God when they see this healing. That's not the wow that's happening here. Rather, this is the wow of people delighting in, or in awe of, a miracle, an impossible thing that has happened.

And Peter and John see this for what it is. It is, what I'm going to call this morning, an awe emergency. This is an awe emergency. They are in awe, they're going, "wow!" in the wrong thing. And you say, well, why is it an awe emergency? Well, because the wow is over a miracle and not over what the miracle points to. And even more dangerously, it's becoming a wow over the people that did the miracle. First, "Wow, what a miracle!" And then it's, "Wow, you guys did that. That's amazing!" Look how Peter describes it in verse 12, he says two

things. He says, number one, “*you wonder at this.*” This being the miracle. And then the very next thing he says, “*you stare at us.*” And so the wow here is finding expression in delight in two guys, Peter and John, and herein is the awe emergency that Peter addresses in our text today.

Awe to mankind for God’s gift is an awe emergency for the Christian. It’s a dangerous scenario because awe in, or wow at, Pete and John will dissolve. Probably by nightfall. Right. Um, even if a great cult were to build up around these men, it’s only a matter of time before they die. And then the delight will collapse. It’ll vanish. Peter and John are not designed to sustain a wow for even a decade. That awe will crumble because it is not rooted in something that can sustain the surprised delight. Even for a few decades, much less for eternity. And so Peter must transfer the wow to God ASAP, or it’s going to be wasted. Right? Just going to be a complete waste at best. But if he can transfer the wow to God, it will become eternal. It will become living. It will become reproductive or, to kind of put it in how we’re looking at Acts, it will become expanding.

And so we come to our text this morning, verse 12. “*When Peter saw it...*” That people are going, wow. And they’re coming to them. Remember they’re under the porch... Solomon’s porch on the east side of the temple there. “*He addressed the people.*” He says, “*Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?*” Peter jumps in to address this awe emergency. And the first thing he says is, “Guys, we didn’t do this. It’s not not us.”

Now, in verse 13, we expect to find out who did do it. Right? “We didn’t do it.” “So who did, Peter?” But look what he says in verse 13. We’re actually going to take verse 13 through 16 and just handle it as a chunk here. It begins in verse 13, “*The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.*”

All right. So, so Peter says, “We didn’t do this. What do you think we did this with our own strength, our own godliness? You think we did this? No.” “Who did?” And we expect to hear,

“God did” right? But that's not what Peter says here. What Peter says is kind of a series of things. I want to just walk us through the logic of this set of verses... these three verses.

Peter says, first of all, God glorified Jesus, but you delivered over Jesus. You denied Jesus, you killed Jesus. And Jesus did this. It's almost the same as, “God did it.” Let's talk through why he did it this way.

So God glorified Jesus. In other words, you expect to hear God did this, but here's what God did do: he glorified Jesus. In other words, you cannot have God and say, “well, we'll just leave Jesus over there. We don't really need Jesus. We just want God.” No, no, God glorified Jesus. You can't glorify God without glorifying Jesus. God glorified him. He says *“his servant Jesus.”* Every Jewish person in that room, every single Jewish person listening, knew exactly what he was talking about when he said *“his servant Jesus.”* He's talking about Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering servant. Every Jew got that reference. God has chosen to reveal himself through the son. In other words, Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ. Those two... “The Christ” means “the Messiah.” Interchangeable. He goes, “Jesus is the Messiah.” That's what he means when he says, *“God has glorified Jesus.”* Then he says, “Here's what you did. You delivered over Jesus to Pilate. So you arrested him, condemned him, and then said to Rome, can you kill him please? You denied Jesus went when Pilate says he's innocent. He said, no, no, no, no, no, you keep him. We'll take Barabbas, we'll take a murderer. And then Peter says, “You killed him” in verse 15. “You killed Jesus.”

In verse 16, then he gets around to saying, but... *“and his name, [Jesus' name]—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.”* In other words, not “God did this”, but, “hey, Jesus did this.” Jesus did this. Had Peter said, “God did this,” they would have all walked away perfectly happy. They would have been like, “Okay, good. Awesome.” They'd have walked away happy and lost.

And here's the point: Christianity holds that there is no way to be restored to friendship with God, the father, but through the Christ. Jesus. That's it. You don't get to say, “I'll have God, but not Jesus.” It is not good enough to agree on God. Christianity insists that God has revealed himself through Jesus—not the saints, not Mary, not the church, not the scriptures merely, not Muhammad, not the Buddhists—but through the person of Jesus. Any faith that does not insist on Jesus as the only way to God is not compatible with Christianity. There's no way to make them fit. Here at CrossPoint, we are not Christocentric. We are not Christ centred. We are Theocentric. We are God-centred. It's a fairly fine point of difference, but

this is why we make it. Even though God... God is the point and Christ gets us to God (is what this text is going to emphasize again and again) still, there's only one way to know and get to God and that is through Christ. So even though Christ is not the centre—God's the centre—Christ is so absolutely essential to get to God. And the rea-- Why? Why does God have to be the centre and not Christ? The answer is the moment Christ becomes the centre then the cross becomes the centre. And what is the cross? It's about getting us to God. We are not the centre of God's world. God is the centre of God's world. Right? And so what happens is very subtly we work ourselves back to us being the point of this whole thing, and we're not. God is. So we keep that... it's a very subtle distinction, but we keep it right. Why is Christ so important? Why is the gospel so important? Because it gets us to God. Now, obviously what we're seeing here is you can't have God without having Christ and that's the whole point here.

But anyway, the Jews rejected Jesus as the Christ. The Jews said, "We'll have God and we'll have his Christ, but not Jesus." They would have been happy to hear that God did this, but they would have understood God totally different from who he actually is. Who God really is, is one who chose to glorify Jesus, to reveal himself through Jesus. And here's what we're seeing is that it's possible to know God from part of the Bible and not know the God of the Bible as he truly is. It's possible to read your Bible and get an accurate view of who God is in one way, in one part, and be right on it—which the Jews did, they read their old Testament and they got it right—and still not know who the God of the Bible is and want to have him without his son, Jesus Christ. And it is dangerous to do so. In fact, it is idolatry. It is taking God and saying, "I'm going to make him the way I want him. I'm going to build-a-bear God. And then I'll worship that."

But Peter goes a step further. In verse 15, Peter points out that when Jesus did this, God did this. Look with me at verse 15. He says, "*and you killed the Author of life.*" Now he's doing some literary things there in contrasting killing life. Um, but what I want us to notice here is simply that Peter standing here and John is standing next to him. Remember John? He's the guy who said, "*all things were created by him and nothing was created that was not created by him.*" Speaking of Jesus. Here's what he's saying. Jesus is not a created being. Jesus is not one of the things that God created. Jesus is the author of the creation. Jesus made the other beings. What he is saying is, quite plainly, Jesus is God. Jesus is not just a guy. Jesus made you. Like, he made you. This is not something you could say of any created creature.

Peter says, "Not only is Jesus the Christ—you didn't see that coming—but the Christ is God. You didn't see that coming either. But Peter right here, I mean in the very, very earliest days of the church crystal clear: the deity of Jesus Christ.

Now Peter could have been diplomatic about this. Right? He could have said, "Guys, we didn't do this. We didn't do this. It's not by our power and piety. God did this." And he would have been accurate, would have been true. Right. And there would've been no problem. Everyone would've walked away happy. We know what it means. We know that God did this to his son Jesus Christ. What we said to them was also true. So who's to complain? Instead, he makes a point of saying it in such a way that he will have, by the end of it, accused them of killing God.

Our job on this planet is not just to be nice. Sometimes when the stakes are Gospel high, we need to go out of our way to confront the lie with the truth. Ecumenical worship, in order to be legitimate for Christians, must be around the fundamentals of the faith. Never apart from them. It's wonderful when Christians can get together and worship God. That's wonderful. Even though we might disagree on how you baptize people or how you do this or that. Like, that's great. But never, "look push all those things aside." Then what are we going to get together and do? Be glad we're together. That's all we can do because all the guts are taken out it. The guts is what matters. We have to be able to agree on the fundamental stuff if we're ever going to get together and worship God, otherwise it's not God we're worshiping. You understand the Christians could have easily sat down and had a great little time with these people. "God did this" and it would have been easy. Everyone would have been happy. That's not okay for Peter. Peter's not... that's not good enough. Yes, God did this, but that's not the part that hurts. That's not the part that matters right now. God glorified the Christ and you despise the Christ. That has to be resolved. And so he just front and centre: Jesus did this.

We'll move on. Verse 17. "*Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers.*" The condemnation, the painful truth, is followed here by mercy. He offers a mitigating factor and that is ignorance. You didn't understand what you were doing. And this is—not so surprising for the Jews—this is really quite generous to the Jewish leaders. Stretching credulity kind of generous.

Verse 18, "*But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled.*" So Peter may be generous to the Jewish leaders to the point of

arguable inaccuracy, but, but he isn't giving an inch on the facts. He says, "You may have been ignorant, but you shouldn't have been." Right? Like it was right there in your Bible all along. The prophets said this is what was going to happen. God said his Christ would suffer. And his point here is that when God said his Christ would suffer, he used your evil to fulfil that. It was thus that it was fulfilled.

Verse 19, and we'll read three verses here. He says, "*Therefore, repent... Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.*" Now Peter offers hope. He says you killed God, but you didn't understand. And probably what he's doing here is in Jewish thought, you read the Old Testament, there is no explicit redemption for sin committed knowingly. You look at the entire Old Testament system, there is no system in there for redemption of sin that is wilfully committed. That doesn't mean there is no redemption, but their whole system depended on... you were trying to submit and you, you erred. And Peter's saying, "Look, you didn't really understand what you were doing, but repent now and make it right." Repentance feels like the way of despair, but it is not. It is the way of hope.

And he says to them, "If you repent, then you will understand that the time we have been waiting for, for all these thousands of years has come. The long wait is over." He describes it here as "*the times of refreshing.*" You missed out on enjoying him while he was here as did most of the Jews, but it's not too late to take part in the times of refreshing. Jesus is the Christ, and the thing we have been waiting for, for thousands of years, is here. Repent of having rejected him and killed him, and come enjoy it with us. Right? Join the joy!

But then he goes on in verse 21 to point out that even though there is great joy at the end of this long wait having come, yet there is another wait and it's already started. Verse 21 there. He says, "*Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all things.*" Heaven must receive. He's talking about the ascension. Jesus rose. Heaven received him. He went up to heaven until the time when he's going to come and restore all things. So here's, here's, what's going on here. "Jesus went up and here's what some of us Jews..." [Peter] "...here's what some of us Jews missed, like, right up until the end. Are you going to restore the kingdom now? How about now? Are you ready, Jesus? Come on. Can we put... When you get to your throne, can I sit next to you?" Like this is all they're thinking. "We missed this, but we understand it now, is that when Jesus comes the first time, he came to suffer. He didn't come to reign the first time. He's gone for a bit now, but he is coming back

to finish fulfilling the prophecies about the ongoing... undoing the destruction of the curse. So here's... The Christ came the first time to suffer. Heaven must receive him until the time for restoring. The second time he comes back, he's going to finish what he did decisively the first time. He nailed it at the cross. He just nailed it. But he has not chosen to work that out into redeeming the whole creation yet. But he will. There's a period of time when Jesus must be received into Heaven, awaiting the restoring. And he says, "The first wait is over! Good news! But, by the way, now we get to wait again."

The first time they waited for the Christ, they waited almost 2000 years from the time of Abraham. How long will it be this time? Well, it's been a couple of weeks now. We're in the temple. It's been a couple of weeks. Come wait with us until he comes and restores all things. I wonder how long it will be.

And here we are now almost 2000 years later. Again. Hasn't come yet. He did the first time. And he's gonna the second time. And we continue the vigil that they started right here in Solomon's porch in Jerusalem.

Verse 22, he goes on and he says, "*Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.'*" Right. Peter, Peter's saying, "Let me remind you of the prophecies right here in your Bible." And he takes them to Deuteronomy chapter 18 verse 15 through 19. Look it up if you get time today. It is stunning to see it. I've read it many times and missed this. But you read it carefully and it's staring you in the face. Moses predicted the Christ. Moses made it very clear that ignoring the Christ would be dangerous for your soul.

Verse 24, "*All the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days.*" Peter's saying, "Come on, people, read your Bible. Is there a prophet? He's there. What was he prophesying? Ultimately, he was prophesying about Christ. And if you look carefully, you'll see two, two things. You'll see the suffering Christ and you'll see a reigning Christ. And of course we didn't understand that they would not be together in time, but we didn't need to. We just had to trust." Just like we do now. Now we look back on the suffering part and we look forward to the reigning part. Read your Bible. All the prophets say this. He's talking to Jews who knew their Old Testament well and he's saying, "It's right here. It's right there. It's right there."

Verse 25. He goes on, and we'll put 25 and 26 together. "*You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'*" [Verse 26] "*God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.*" So, so here's, what's happening. Verse 25, "You are part of the fulfilment of God's covenant promise. You. The fact that you Jewish people exist means God has kept his promise to Abraham. But verse 26 then says, but, but Jesus is the rest of it, right? The reason God raises the nation is to raise the Christ.

How is God going to bless all the families of the earth? Look at verse 25 "*And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*" Verse 26. "*God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you.*" How are you going to bless the families? Well first, the Christ is going to bless you "*by turning every one of you from your wickedness.*" That's how, that's how God's going to bless the nations of the world. He's going to do it by blessing you by causing you to repent. See, the Jewish people when they understood that God had chosen them, got all proud. Like, "We're the people. We're the ones." Right? And they forgot what they were chosen for. What they were chosen to. They were chosen to holiness. Here, quite literally, they were chosen to repent. The Jewish people were created to be blessed by repenting so that they would bless the world. By sending the gospel to the world. That's literally Peter's interpretation of the covenant.

But notice here, he says that God's servant Jesus was sent to the Jews first. First. God always intended for the gospel to go to the nations. And so again, we're getting this hint of the expansion that is going to come very soon. God started with the Jews. The Christ came to the Jews first, and the implication that's just sort of latent here in Luke's writing of this history is, but the Christ is going to the Gentiles next. The Christ, the gospel, the truth is going to the families of the earth next. He's blessing you first. And then he's going to use you to bless the nations. And that's exactly what he did. Who are the missionaries who go preach the gospel to the Gentiles? It's the Jews, right? God started here with you Jews, and then he is going to take those of you—and only those of you—who repent and use you to bless all the families of the earth. And he's saying to these Jewish people, you can continue to be true Jews by repenting, or you can continue to reject the Christ and therefore reject your, your faith. Reject Jewishness. And what will be left is a Jewish nation waiting for a Messiah who will never come because he has already come.

And now we see in chapter 4 the fallout of this incident, as we finish. Look at the first three verses together, *“As they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.”* The very religious leaders that Peter had just spoken generously of show up and demonstrate who they really are. People, particularly religious leaders, don't always like it when people speak the truth. And in this case, they do exactly what they did to Jesus. They made an arrest. “We're not going to put up with this. The truth will not be tolerated.”

Verse 4, *“But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.”* The truth of the gospel has been proclaimed uncompromisingly and some respond in faith. Some believed. The population of Jerusalem at this time is anywhere from 25,000 people to 250,000 people. But however many it is, 5,000 probably actually referring to the males. Plus females. Plus children. This is a huge number of people. Probably this is the cumulative. This is all the people that were saved at Pentecost leading up to this day. Still a huge proportion of the Jewish people in Jerusalem are responding to the Gospel.

And here we are 2000 years later and that “wow” that took root in some of their lives still grows in us and keeps on seeding to the ends of the earth. That day in Jerusalem, under Solomon's porch, they did not even know Australia existed. Hadn't occurred to them yet. But here is the plant of gladness in God that is growing in this room today.

Father, we thank you for the courage of men like Peter, John, and other early Christians who saw awe in a superficial act and in people as an awe emergency. And who quickly attempted to root that awe in someone who could sustain it forever. We thank you that by your sovereign kindness that awe took root in the hearts of many people that day, and the days before and after, and was transplanted all over the world so that we would come to know that same awe. We are saddened by how dim it is. By how difficult it is for us to see your beauty clearly in this world that has known the suffering Christ, but does not yet experience the ruling, reigning Christ. We look forward with joy to the day when Jesus will return and work out into the creation all that he began at the cross. Help us in this time of waiting, as we wait along with those early believers, to guard our hope. To fight for our gladness. And to root our awe in you so that it will survive forever. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.

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