

... Where lives are being changed by God... (Acts 4:1-22)

This is week two of our look again at the vision of Wade Street Church, of what we believe God has called us to do and be as a group of Christians here in Lichfield. If you were here last week you'll know that Ian spoke about our 'strap line' (for want of a better word) that we use on all kinds of things including the website, the Vision magazine, the notice sheet, publicity that we put out, that was formulated at a time when the church was considering developing this site further, eventually leading to the amazing facilities we have today.

A church at the heart of the city with Christ at the heart of the church .

And as we heard last week, it's ten years ago (almost to the day) since that vision for the church was set out.

The more detailed part of the vision statement was formed some twenty years ago, before a fair few of us worshipped here. Before some of you had committed your lives to Christ. Before some of you were even born!

There has been nothing over the years to indicate that we should be changing our vision statement. (although of course how we work it out in practice is evolving all the time) And so it remains...

Wade Street Church is a church where lives are being changed by God and his people look upwards in worship, forward to growth and maturity and outwards in care, concern and evangelism.

This morning we're looking at the very first part of the statement. Wade Street Church is a church *where lives are being changed by God.*

So I want to ask two questions this morning.

1. What does it mean to have your life changed by God?
2. Is this a church where lives are being changed by God? (as our vision statement says it is)

What does it mean to have your life changed by God?

There are absolutely loads of examples of changed lives in the Bible (as you would hope and expect!) I was spoilt for choice. In the end I settled on this passage from Acts that I read a few moments ago because it's a kind of two for the price of one!!

Although I didn't actually read that specific bit, the passage refers to a crippled beggar who has just been healed. His life has been changed by God. And then there's Peter and John who are great examples of lives changed by God.

In the bit that I didn't read, Peter and John are on their way to the temple when they come across this chap asking for money. There's a children's song about it that I'm sure many of you know and could hum along to given the chance! I'm going to resist the temptation to burst into song but the words are: Peter and John went to pray, they met a lame man on the way, he held out his palms and he asked for alms and this is what Peter did say...Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have I give thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.

And that is a pretty good summary of what did happen. (*ch3v6-8*) *Peter said... in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk.*

And if you know the rest of the song it goes 'he went walking a leaping and praising God, walking and leaping and praising God'

The man's life was changed by God – miraculously, dramatically, physically. It would never ever be the same again – he suddenly had a new perspective, new hope, new opportunities - new life had begun.

So what does it mean to have your life changed by God? All of those things! Perhaps not quite so dramatically for some of us, perhaps not always accompanied by a physical healing, but life –changing nonetheless. A life changed by God means new perspective, new hope, new opportunities, freedom from the things that have bound us and restricted us. We are, as the Apostle Paul says, New Creations.

Peter and John had had their lives changed by God. Right back when a chap had walked past them and their boats and said 'follow me'. They had had their lives changed by God as they followed Jesus around Galilee - hearing his teaching, watching his interaction with people, absorbing his world view. They had had their lives changed by God as they experienced the desolation of their teacher hanging on a cross, and the euphoria of meeting him as the Risen Christ. They had had their lives changed by God as the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost.

The Sanhedrin noted (v13) that these were unschooled and ordinary men , but that they had been with Jesus. Experiencing the love and grace and forgiveness of God changes our lives. Being with Jesus means on-going change. We might not have the benefit of literally following him round Galilee, but neither have the millions of other Christians over the last 2000 or so years. If our lives are *being changed* by God then I believe that others will be able to look at us and note that we have been with Jesus.

And that's why I went for this passage of scripture when I could have gone for many others. It captures a life **just changed**, and lives **being changed**.

A church where lives are being changed by God?

So, is this a church where lives are being changed by God, as our vision statement says it is? How do we measure something like that?

Well, if it is then we will be seeing transformation in the lives of those we have contact with through the life of the church. We will see people experiencing new life, new hope, new opportunities, new freedom as they become a new creation. We will see lives changed significantly and permanently as we saw in the beggar who called out to Peter and John, getting more than he bargained for. We will see people walking and leaping and praising God in their new found freedom.

We will also see, if we're living up to our vision statement, lives changing over time to reflect more and more the love of Jesus. Lives that others can look at and remark 'they have been with Jesus'.

This is a church where lives are being changed by God. In a few weeks time we'll both see and hear that as there is a baptism service. This morning (at the 9 o'clock service) we have heard how lives have been changed by God. There is currently an Alpha course running through which we pray lives will be changed by God. There is much work that goes on in the house groups, MOB and Sunday club, helping people to walk closer to Jesus each day, allowing their lives to be changed by God.

So is Wade Street Church a church where lives are being changed by God? Yes! But it could be so much more. We have literally hundreds of people we're in contact with. We want to see their lives changed by God, transformed with new life, new hope, new perspective. We want to see them becoming new creations.

And we want to see more and more lives *being changed* as people grow and develop into mature followers of Christ, never satisfied to sit back but always wanting to reflect more and more Jesus.

The next few weeks of preaching will focus on the rest of the vision statement, and in a way that expresses how we go about seeing lives changed by God – as we consider our worship, our growth and maturity and our care, concern and evangelism. But this morning I want us to go away with two things fixed very firmly in our minds –

That it is lives *being changed* by God

And that we cannot and must not sit back

We cannot do this by hard work alone – although hard work is required! We need to seek God's will and call on His Spirit.

House Group Notes 22.04.12
..Where lives are being changed by God.. (Acts 4:1-22)

*Wade Street Church is a church **where lives are being changed by God** and his people look upwards in worship, forward to growth and maturity and outwards in care, concern and evangelism.*

This vision statement was formed some twenty years ago, and whilst how we work it out in practice is constantly evolving, there has been nothing to suggest that our aims as a church should alter.

What does it mean to have your life changed by God?

Acts chapters 3 & 4 demonstrate a life dramatically changed by God (the crippled beggar) and lives continually being changed by God (Peter & John). The beggar's life was changed miraculously, dramatically and physically, giving him new perspective, new hope and new opportunities (*Acts 3:7-10*). A life changed by God means freedom from the things that have bound us and restricted us. We are, as the Apostle Paul says, New Creations.

Peter and John had had their lives changed by God when Jesus said "follow me", then as they followed Jesus around Galilee - hearing his teaching, watching his interaction with people, absorbing his world view, then as they experienced the desolation of their teacher hanging on a cross and the euphoria of meeting him as the Risen Christ, then as the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost. A life changed by God means on-going change.

Is this a church where lives are being changed by God?

If it is then we will be seeing transformation in the lives of those we have contact with through the life of the church. We will see people experiencing new life, new hope, new opportunities, new freedom as they become a new creation. We will see lives changed significantly and permanently as we saw in the beggar who called out to Peter and John, getting more than he bargained for. We will see people walking and leaping and praising God in their new found freedom. We will also see, if we're living up to our vision statement, lives changing over time to reflect more and more the love of Jesus. Lives that others can look at and remark 'they have been with Jesus'.

Is this a church where lives are being changed by God? Yes. People have testified to that. Some are preparing for baptism, an Alpha course is running. There is much work that goes on in the house groups, MOB and Sunday club, helping people to walk closer to Jesus each day, allowing their lives to be changed by God. But it could be so much more. We have literally hundreds of people we're in contact with. We want to see their lives changed by God, transformed with new life, new hope, new perspective. We want to see them becoming new creations. And we want to see more and more lives *being changed* as people grow and develop into mature followers of Christ, never satisfied to sit back but always wanting to reflect more and more of Jesus.

For Discussion

1. What has it meant for you to have your life changed by God?
2. Do we always live as if we have been transformed? Why/why not? What could be different?
3. How could we improve as a church in (a) helping people to experience changed lives & (b) encouraging on-going change?

The disciples were dramatically changed by the Holy Spirit. Have you experienced the power of God's Spirit? What difference (if any) has it made to your life?