

Eternity Daily Bible Study - No. 361
Series: The Primal Church - Acts Chapters 1-8
Verses: Acts 4:1-4
Topic: Two Reactions To Truth
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Acts 4:1-4 MKJV And as they spoke to the people, the priests, and the temple commander, and the Sadducees came on them, (2) being grieved that they taught the people, even to announce through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. (3) And they laid hands on them and put them under guard until the next day, for it was already evening. (4) But many of those who heard the Word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

Here we see two reactions to truth: – on one hand there was hostile resistance from those with power and entrenched positions, on the other hand there was glad acceptance by those who saw the benefits of the gospel and the power of God.

Paul also had this effect for it is the effect of the gospel truthfully proclaimed:

2 Corinthians 2:14-17 ISV (14) But thanks be to God! He always leads us triumphantly in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of knowing him. (15) To God we are the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are being lost. (16) To some people we are a deadly fragrance, while to others we are a living fragrance. Who is qualified for this? (17) At least we are not commercializing God's word like so many others. Instead, in Christ we speak with sincerity, like people who are sent from God and are accountable to God.

The gospel is bad news to the proud and good news to the humble, it is bad news to people who believe they are right and are righteous and it is good news to sinners seeking grace. To those who are being lost it is a “deadly fragrance” because it hardens their heart like stone. To those who are being saved it is a living fragrance that brings eternal life to their souls.

The gospel when it is proclaimed truthfully is not “marketable” or commercially acceptable. (2 Corinthians 4:17) It offends many with the offense of the cross and arouses deep hostility and persecution.

Christ crucified is “to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness”:

1 Corinthians 1:20-23 MKJV (20) Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the lawyer of this world? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? (21) For since, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom did not know God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe. (22) For the Jews ask for a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; (23) but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness.

This is not just poor preaching or a lack of diplomatic skill, rather it is the very nature of Christ's radical message:

Matthew 10:34-39 MKJV Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth. I did not come to send peace, but a sword. (35) For I have come to set a man against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. (36) And a man's foes shall be those of his own household. (37) He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. (38) And he who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. (39) He who finds his life shall lose it. And he who loses his life for My sake shall find it.

The vast bulk of people are well armored against any perception of their own sinfulness and struggle to take even minimal responsibility for their mistakes. Some like the Sadducees (the liberal theologians of Jesus' day) have beliefs they will kill for – in this case the belief that “there is no resurrection” which was clearly challenged by Jesus rising from the dead and by the powerful miracle in His name. The high priests and court officials were all Sadducees. Peter and John were preaching the gospel on their turf in the Temple and so they arrested them. This is the reaction of a deeply threatened belief system and a very guilty conscience.

According to some texts this is all one day – Pentecost! In the morning at 9am the Spirit falls and 3000 believe, that same afternoon at 3 pm they heal the lame man and again proclaim the gospel and late that day they are arrested and held overnight. By the end of the day 5000 men have believed – presumably along with their families. (*Acts 3:1 in the MKJV reads: And on the same day Peter and John went up into the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.* The phrase “epi de auto” in Acts 3:1 meaning “upon the same”. See Adam Clarke's Commentary.)

So in a single day we see two main hours of prayer – the third (9am) and the ninth (3pm) and great miracles happening at both! We see the Spirit falling – and some mocking, while many believe, then the lame man healed, and some angry and again many believing. By the end of the day we have gone from 120 in an upper room to 5000 in the Temple - as a result of the bold proclamation of the gospel, in the power of the Holy Spirit, with signs following. This is a time of great grace and power and also a time of resistance and persecution.

Throughout Acts we see this pattern of bold gospel preaching, in the power of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by healing and signs and wonders – and stiff opposition.

You still see this in many missionary outposts today – where there the preaching of the gospel results in miracles on one hand, and persecution on the other. Yet it is quite uncommon in Western nations. We have been inoculated to grace and are no longer deeply religious. The offer of eternal life excites only a few, and the proclamation of the cross and the resurrection offends few. We have left the Kingdom for the shopping mall. We are more excited by a sale at Macy's than a free offer of forgiveness!

Acts challenges me to bold proclamation and to high expectations of the power of God – even if it will bring offense and persecution. As William Carey said: “Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God.”

Blessings,

John Edmiston

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