

10.02.11 / Acts 4:1-4 and 23-31

PLEASE NOTE:

For the foreseeable future, the Curriculum Guide will be a little different from our typical format. We are trying some new approaches as we make the shift to match the schedules of the Durham and Raleigh East campuses in our weekly study of Scripture. The guide will be closely linked with the actual sermon and will include sermon notes, application questions, and a section on prayer.

Sermon Notes

According to Ephesians 2 (and elsewhere), we were completely dead in our sins and transgressions against our Creator, but because of His love and mercy, we have now been made alive in Christ. Typically, if something is good news, we'll shout it, but despite the fact that this is truly the best news imaginable in the history of all things newsworthy, we sometimes fail to shout this miraculous message. Why? What would cause us to be embarrassed about this news? What would cause us to hide it?

The book of Acts is a grand story about average people who are empowered to do extraordinary things, who receive power that is not ultimately from them, but from God Himself. While we are often tempted in our own self-sufficiency to create and implement strategies to "get stuff done" for the kingdom of God, we must remember that there is only value in a strategy if it is in fact fueled by God's power and not our own. The remarkable events found in the book of Acts don't point us to a foolproof strategy for evangelism. Instead, they point us to the desires of the hearts of the men and women that God allowed to take part in His miraculous work. They point us to the One who these average men and women adored tirelessly, richly. They point us to Jesus Christ, for when their hearts desired Him, the natural byproduct was confidence and boldness in proclaiming His name and sharing His good news.

We often see that while we want to desire the things of God, we don't see the fruit we're hoping to see. In our culture of plenty and of comfort, we often find ourselves in a place where our minds cognitively understand and even endorse the idea of telling others this amazing news, but our actions don't follow suit because our hearts really love something more than we love Christ. There are two ways to look at this: 1) as bad news that condemns us and leaves us guilty and grief-stricken, or 2) as further evidence of God's mercy, that He would allow us to see this, so that we can repent and further taste the freedom He brings us as we learn to rely on Him all the more. #2 is the only appropriate response, as there is no guilt or condemnation for those who are in Christ. So, if we find ourselves personally convicted that there is a desire in our heart, be it comfort, leisure, belonging, or anything else, that is greater than our love for Christ, we should thank God that we can see this, ask for His forgiveness, and praise our King all the more, for He is freeing us from the desires that don't reflect Him and replacing those lesser desires with the desire for HIM instead.

Our hearts will not be changed by implementing policy, and neither will the hearts of those with whom we want to share the good news. Our hearts can only be changed when some larger and more powerful desire comes and dislodges the weaker, lesser desire – then all that you want is to know that thing, to love that thing, and to respond to that thing. When we look at Jesus, the God we rejected in favor of lesser, weaker things, instead of hearing condemnation, we instead hear that we are much loved and welcomed home – we receive mercy, grace, and God Himself, and in this, we are empowered to grow in our affection for the One who has saved us. If what you love ultimately is yourself, you will draw people toward yourself – if what you love is Christ, you will draw people to Christ. What does it look like for you to see lesser desires of your heart replaced by the desire for our King?

Application Questions (these suggested questions are in no particular order)

- Let's celebrate what Jesus is doing in our lives. What is the most transformative thing that you've seen Jesus

do in your life so far?

- What causes you to sometimes be embarrassed by or to hide the good news from others in your life?
- If it's true that while our minds are often convinced of the importance of telling others about Christ, our hearts in reality want something else, what is it that your heart wants more?
- There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, even when we see something that we desire more than we desire God. How does this truth change you right now?

Prayer

- That the Father would draw others to Himself as only He can do.
- That we would simply adore our God as our primary desire.
- For faithfulness.
- For boldness to proclaim God's word.