

Sermon Discussion 10/04/2015

Acts 4:1-31, 5:17-42 – “Faithful Witnesses in a Hostile World” by Drew Hunter

Sunday's Outline

The expansion of the church and the gospel was not without cost and persecution. Acts 4 and 5 shows us that as the church starts growing, it is met with resistance and hostility. It's in these chapters that we see the first persecution of the church. That leaves the early church to be one of two kinds of Christians: category 1 and category 2. Category 2 Christians believe the right things but are not witnesses to others. Category 1 Christians spoke the words of God, no matter the cost. To be a faithful (category 1) witness in this kind of hostile environment required the early Christians (and us today) to embrace these five marks:

1. Balanced expectations (4:1-4) – there is both rejection and reception to the gospel
2. Humble authority (4:5-12) – Peter authoritatively states that our only hope is in Christ
3. Settled convictions (4:13-22) – The apostles obeyed and feared God, not man
4. Stabilizing confidence (4:23-31) – God is sovereign over their mission, so they ask for boldness
5. Enduring joy (5:17-42) – Because they are suffering and rejection for Jesus' sake, they rejoiced

We move from being category 2 to category 1 Christians by seeing the beauty of Christ. The Christians in the first years of the church were faithful witnesses because they saw Jesus' hope in the midst brokenness, His humility & authority converged in His own person, and His enduring joy as He bore the cross.

Quotations

"The message these men proclaimed of Jesus as Messiah was an affront to Judaism. It was not easy for the Jews to see a carpenter as the supreme climax of Israel's development. How could that penniless unordained workman be greater than Abraham, than Moses, than David? Not easy at all." - Michael Greene, *The First Thirty Years*, 18.

Help for Understanding & Application

- 1) Chapters 4 and 5 in Acts describe the first counts of persecution. How did the disciples respond?
- 2) Rico Tice's book, *Honest Evangelism*, describes two different categories of Christians. Category 2 Christians read their Bible, pray, and know doctrine, but their view of the Christian faith does not include being a Christian witness. Category 1 Christians see their lives defined as being one of Christ's ambassadors, and they expend time, energy, and resources to that end. Which category do you in right now? What is evidence of your answer?
- 3) What are some of the biggest struggles you have in being a faithful witness in our community today?
- 4) In what ways are the cultural climates in the early church both similar and different than the cultural climate of central Indiana today?
- 5) Reflect back on a time in your life when you faced persecution for your faith. How did you respond in those moments? In what was it similar and different than how the disciples responded?
- 6) Where do we get authority to speak about Jesus to people?
- 7) What is surprising about the disciples prayer in 5:29ff? See also Psalm 2
- 8) How can we help one another move from being a category 2 to a category 1 Christian?