

12—Acts 4.23-31—The Formation of the Loving and Courageous Church

I. Introduction

- a. In some ways, if we parents want to know what we are like, let's take a look at our kids. The good, the bad and the ugly will show up in them. As I thought about this text, I see the church becoming like their God! There's no way to have a bold church that believes in a puny god. Confident...steady...bold...unshakeable comes from following the big and sovereign God who created all things. Whatever happens, they can say with Job for though he was righteous suffered: "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the Name of the Lord."
- b. When we go on vacation, whether that be in the mountains or at the beach, I seek to help my kids not to be afraid. I climb and explore things my kids would not otherwise try if I am not leading them. They have experienced the power and majesty of ocean waves as we have ventured further into water. They have climbed mountains with me to get a better view of a waterfall.
- c. They go because I go. It's like the first time they wanted to jump into the pool but do not want to go under the water. Dad's strong arms and trustworthy character gives them the courage to leap into the unknown because they trust who dad is.

II. Main Point

- a. If the Sovereign God of the universe controlled what happened to Jesus, then He is and always will be in control of what happens to the body of Christ—the Church. Come what may by the hand of the Lord and may we continue to speak the gospel!

III. Outline (Three Observations of how the church is becoming like their God)

- a. The Loving church loves each other simply
- b. The Loving Church trusts the Sovereign God supremely
- c. The Loving Church loves their neighbor sacrificially

IV. Exposition

- a. Let's begin by looking at how the Loving church loves its own simply
 - i. As this scene begins, we know the trial has just ended. The court threatened the apostles never to speak or teaching in the Name of Jesus ever again so that it doesn't continue to spread.
 - ii. Peter replies with a bold statement: (Acts 4:19-20) "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, ²⁰ for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."
 1. If this last section was all about speaking and teaching about Jesus and the resurrection, this section is concerned with whether they will indeed continue speaking or not.
 2. You might think it was by simple determination on their part to continue. You might think the apostles' arrest did not affect them. You might think that Peter and John will go at it alone. You might think that it's okay if everybody in the church has a differing opinion on whether they continue speaking and teaching Jesus.
 - a. DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD CONTINUE SPEAKING AND TEACHING JESUS IN THIS COMMUNITY?
 - b. I don't know how a church can live for God's glory and NOT speak about his glory to others. It just doesn't make sense.
 3. If any of these things are true then whatever it is you think is loving is not. What we see described is not what I just described. This church is the loving church because she has her priorities right.
 - iii. The scene opens up with Peter and John having been released.
 1. This could have gone very different. What if they had been crucified? What would have happened? Would the gospel had made it to us? It didn't go that way because God is

- sovereign. And the gospel made it to us because the sovereign Lord continues to make Himself known through His witnesses.
2. After their release, they went to their friends, literally their own. We have good reason to believe these are some, if not all, the new believers. In chapter 5, Luke begins to call this group the church.
 - a. This cannot be overlooked. They had “their own” to go to.
 - b. They seemed to have been gathered somewhere waiting.
 - c. In chapter 12, they are gathered together praying for Peter to be released from prison again.
 - d. It’s easy to think this was the formation of the church gathering together praying and waiting for their brothers in Christ to be released for preaching the gospel.
 - e. It is so encouraging to see the church be there for each other. It so encouraging to see them together.
 3. That is the first mark of a loving church, loving their own by simply being there for them.
- iv. When Peter and John arrive, they report everything that the chief priests and the elders had said.
 1. Most certainly, it was the threats of not speaking and teaching Christ and the resurrection.
 - a. They reported all these things because they were in need.
 - i. Wouldn’t our business meeting be much better if these were the kinds of things we reported on?
 - b. What did they need? They needed help. They needed support. They needed encouragement. They needed to know that they weren’t alone.
 - c. They needed reminding of the truth instead listening to those threats replaying over and over in their mind.
 2. Notice the love and beauty of verse 24, “And when they heard it...”
 - a. Let’s pause and observe. Do you see it? They listened. The loving church loves by simply listening.
 - b. So the loving church loves by hearing the report with the intentions of helping, supporting, encouraging, and being with each other through it all.
 - v. The next mark is their response.
 1. “And having heard it, they lifted their voice to God and said...”
 - a. They prayed in one voice (singular) with one accord.
 - i. They had the same mind and voice. They were all on the same page. They had one purpose and everything in common. In other words, they had community—common unity...true fellowship.
 2. The loving church is there for its own, they listen, and they act by praying. This is true Christian fellowship. This is true church. Simple but true.
 - b. They are gathered together because a powerful group of people had gathered together to threaten them to stop teaching about Jesus. They need help from someone more powerful. The loving church trusts the loving and sovereign God supremely.
 - i. How did they love God supremely? By trusting Him fully for who He is.
 - ii. The way they addressed God in their prayer tells you what they believe about Him.
 1. They pray, “Sovereign Lord.” The Greek word they used was “despotas” which means Absolute Ruler or the Ruler whose power cannot be challenged.

- a. Our English word, despot comes from this word, which has a negative taste. But we cannot impose our definition on this word.
 - b. God is the Absolute Ruler of all things. To think of God as less than sovereign is to disregard who God is.
 - c. Do you ever walk outside and gaze into the heavens at all the stars or stand on the beach observing their glory?
 - i. Strangely, we can look at these massive realities ever before us and love them instead of the One who created them. It like loving your wedding ring more than your wife.
2. Creation is exactly where they go next. They pray, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them.”
 - a. *******(Ps. 19:1-2) The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. ² Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.
 - b. Every day, creation bears witness to God and His absolute sovereignty. That’s why Paul says in (Rom. 1:19-22) ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools
 - c. When fears come upon you take a walk outside and gaze into the heavens and know that God knows every star by name.
 3. The loving church loves that God is sovereign. They love him supremely by believing he is sovereign.
- iii. The loving church also loves God supremely because he has spoken.
 1. Notice in verse 25 how they understand scripture.
 2. They believe God speaks by the Holy Spirit through human beings. In this case, it was their father David who wrote Psalm 2.
 3. The loving church knows the Bible. So much so, that is what they pray. They pray God’s word back to him. This is supremely loving to God.
 4. Let’s hear the verses they quote in their prayer.
 - a. (Acts 4:25-26) 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'
 - b. Psalm 2 describes those who have taken their stand with sinners and they stand against the LORD and against his Anointed.
 - i. Originally, the Jews would have applied this to themselves and their King. To be the king, like David, was to mean you were God’s anointed. In fact, Samuel had anointed David as King.
 - ii. Yet, this pointed to Jesus as the Anointed One—promised Messiah.
 - iii. So, for the nations, let’s says the Philistines to stand against Israel and their king would be to stand against God and his anointed.
 5. The loving church who loves God supremely knows they are God’s people. If people stand against them, they are standing against God Himself.

- a. They apply these verses to their current situation. In Jerusalem, Herod, Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles (that is, the Romans) and the people of Israel gathered together (took their stand) against God's holy Servant, Jesus who is called the Christ, which means Anointed One.
 - b. They see their actions against Jesus completely in the hands of God "to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." They could not have done otherwise!
 - i. They knew what had happened to Jesus was the divine will and plan of God, who decides the affairs of His world.
 - ii. They know that these evil acts by evil men can be for good. Even so, they are responsible for their actions. Indeed, Jesus offers forgiveness to those who were responsible for his death.
 - iii. They thought and the devil thought they had won at the cross but in fact, they had lost because they were carrying out God's predetermined plan to save His people. And he does...as many as received Jesus.
- iv. The loving church knows God. They have sound doctrine. They exalt God in their prayers, first. Now they ask. Here comes their requests.
1. Take note what the loving church requests...particularly what they say after the command to look upon their threats (Acts 4:29) ²⁹ And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness,
 - a. The first demand from this church is that the Lord look upon their threats.
 - i. I think many of us would pray this if we were threatened. Lord, keep an eye them. They have spoken boldly against us and against you.
 - ii. That statement isn't surprising to me. What follows is. I can imagine something like this: look upon their threats and rain down fire on them. Or in the words of Gandalf, "Smote their ruin on the mountainside."
 - iii. Put a stop to those who are trying to stop us! Destroy your enemies, Lord. Bring them down like you did Pharaoh who would not let your people go.
 - iv. So, when God looks upon their threats he may or may not stop them. He has purpose in suffering. Indeed, He makes himself known through our suffering.
 - v. The church doesn't ask for them to be eliminated.
 - vi. They ask for courage to continue speaking boldly the hope of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 - vii. In other words, do not let them speaking threats stop us from speaking hope!
 - b. What else is interesting here is how they tie their speaking the gospel boldly with the Lord's continued work.
 - i. V. 30 ...while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."
 - ii. These are Exodus terms. When Moses continued to speak boldly to Pharaoh, God continued to display signs and wonders. It would have made no sense to Pharaoh and the Egyptians if God were doing those signs and Moses had never said, Let my people go.
 - iii. Speaking the gospel and the sign and wonders are connected.

- iv. Jesus is leading a new exodus out of slavery to sin. When his people speak the gospel, signs and wonders are happening. The dead are coming to life. The blind see and deaf hear!
- c. This is the kind of prayer requests that come from a loving church who loves their neighbors/unbelievers sacrificially.
 - i. They desire to keep doing what resulted in the arrest of Peter and John.
 - ii. They fully intend not to listen to the threats of the rulers.
 - iii. They cannot help but speak of those things, which they have seen and heard.
 - iv. They do not want to be timid but bold.
 - v. They are certain that God is sovereign.
 - vi. They are certain that he hears their prayers.
 - vii. They are certain that he wants them to continue speaking the Word with all boldness in the power of the Spirit so that many will hear and believe!!!
 - viii. They do not assume it is automatic. They want it. They plead for strength to continue.
 - ix. (Acts 4:31) ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.
 - 1. And when they had prayed. That is beautiful. How did they get there?
 - a. The apostles were released. They went to their own. They reported the threats. They listened. They prayed.
 - b. The Sovereign Lord who made all things, who has spoken in his word, who decides what takes place....
 - i. Shakes the place in which they had gathered together. It's as though he said, "I heard you!"
 - ii. "That made them the more unshaken" (Chrysostom).
 - iii. He filled them all with the Holy Spirit.
 - 2. And guess what? They continued to speak the word of God with boldness.
 - x. The loving church is there for its own. The loving church is eager for the report with intentions of doing something. The loving church listens. The loving church lifted up their voice with one purpose.
 - xi. The loving church loves God's sovereignty.
 - xii. The loving church wants their neighbors to hear the word of God and be saved.
 - xiii. The loving church continues to speak the word of God with boldness.

V. Conclusion

- a. I want to leave you with this. In verse 26 and 27, it says the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed which was Jesus. Last week we saw the rulers gathered together against Peter and John.
- b. However, something greater was gathered together. In verse 37, it says the place in which they were gathered together was shaken.
- c. Those gathered threaten God's people not to speak anymore.
- d. The church gathered to ask the Sovereign Lord to grant them to continue to speak the word of God boldly.
- e. Which gathering is greater and more powerful? Rulers or a loving church? Who continued to speak God's word?
- f. Now we must ask, are we this church?