



## The Message That Draws Us Together

- many of us watched with amazement the wildfire that raged across Arizona in June.
- known formally as the wallow fire, officials now say the fire burned more than 469,000 acres, or 733 square miles, or an area twice the size of Chicago...
- 5000 residents were told to evacuate mountain communities and many homes were lost...
- the fire spread at such an incredible rate and pace literally hundreds of thousands of people were without electricity because of how many power lines went down...affecting some utility customers as far east as the state of Texas...
- there were more than 4700 firefighters engaged in this battle...and I'm sure many of them felt like this poor fellow..."I really need a bigger shovel..."
- that's the thing about a forest fire – its ability to spread rapidly, and once it gets going---it is very hard to put out...
  
- if you have trusted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you are part of something that has power like that to spread...not in a destructive way, but in a positive fashion that accomplishes the work of God in this age...
  - it's the proclamation of the gospel...a message that some people try to ignore and others try to stamp out...but it's too late...
  - the Holy Spirit of God started the fire...and being part of that great news of Jesus Christ and the new life that is available in/through His name being spread throughout our community and around this world is what draws a church of people like ours together...
  - this morning, I'd like to talk to you about that message...
  - **The Message that Draws Us Together...**
  
- with that in mind, please open your Bible to Acts chapter 4...The book of Acts is the first book describing the birth and history of the early church...
  - and it is filled with discussions about how the initial followers of Jesus related to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ
  - so the thought is – let's learn all we can about how to live life together now by carefully examining all the ways they lived life together then...
  
- one of the essential verses to know is... **Acts 1:8 - but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.**
- so there's a clear promise – something is going to happen in the future..."when the Holy Spirit comes...then you'll be my witness..."
  
- well, when was that promise fulfilled?...10 days later...on the day of Pentecost...  
**read Acts 4:1-36...**

## The Message that Draws Us Together...- 4 characteristics of the gospel that bind us together as a family...

### I. A Message of Hope.

Do you remember what Jesus said to His disciples before He went to the cross?

- **John 14:12 - Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father.**
  - how could you do greater works than Jesus did?...it's because many of Christ's miracles were both marvelous but also temporary...even Lazarus who was raised from the dead...eventually died again...
  - but the work Christ has called us to do has eternal impact on the lives of those who repent and believe...
- it's a message of hope...

#### **A. Even in the midst of opposition.**

- the passage says that the priests and the captains of the temple and the Sadducees and Annas and Caiaphas were...

##### **1. Some were "greatly disturbed" by this message – v. 2.**

- and you can certainly see why...they were involved in putting Jesus to death...
- and they went to bed on Good Friday believing they had won the battle...the fire was out...their leader was dead...
- and now there are these reports circulating everywhere that He's alive...
- and the Sadducees would have especially been upset from a theological perspective because they denied the possibility of resurrection—so their entire belief system is at stake...
- so they essentially running around with a little shovel trying to put out a really big fire...but it's too late...and verse 4 makes that clear...

##### **2. Many others believed – v. 4.**

- **Acts 4:4 - But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand. Hope works best in hopeless situations. (Where do you need hope?)**
- the church is growing quickly and dramatically...regardless of what others were doing to try to stop it...why?...because it was...

#### **B. Centered on the powerful name of our risen Savior.**

- that's why Peter ended this conversation by saying...
- **Acts 4:10-12 - let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. "He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone. "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."**
- one of the best compliments that can ever be given to a church is – you know, you people are always talking about Christ...you can't go very far into a substantive conversation without bringing in the name of Jesus...
- you don't talk much about politics, or extraneous religious laws, or the latest fad of the day, or the opinions of men...that's right...we want our lives and our ministries and our message to be centered on the gospel of Christ...
- it's like Paul would later say... **1 Corinthians 2:1-2 - And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.**
- [and it's amazing how frequently the Lord will give us opportunities to proclaim this message if we're looking for them...

## II. A Message of Transformation.

- Acts 4 is the beginning of the persecution of the church...
- it is a very important development in church history...
- but what happens is – that pressure results in the message being spread and the disciples being both matured and drawn together...
- that's one of the things we love about the message—is that it transforms us...

### A. Makes “wise the simple.”

- **Acts 4:13 - Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and *began* to recognize them as having been with Jesus.**
- something miraculous has happened to these men because they are uneducated and untrained...
- and I realize the wording of this point might strike you as odd...but it comes from the OT book of Psalms when David was discussing the impact God's Word can have on us...
- **Psalms 19:7 - The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.**
- and as a result, it...

### B. Generates indisputable evidence.

- **Acts 4:14 - And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply.**
- it is really hard to argue with a changed life...what do you say to that?...

### Many Christians are tempted to says:

- you know, I'm not really sure I see a place for me here...I just recently came to Christ and I have so much to learn and so many things to change...what contribution could I ever make?...
- please don't ever believe that...it's the contribution of a changed and changing life...and that greatly helps this church accomplish our mission to faithfully proclaim Christ in this community...
- there are people who have walked faithfully with Christ for 20 years...that becomes indisputable evidence...
- there are marriages here that are hitting the 25 year mark, 30, 40, 50...
  - by people who would say – Jesus is the One who kept us together – bingo...argue with that...
  - There are people here who are committed to live in both holiness and sacrificial service...that screams a message about the transforming power of Christ...
  - we have a lot of parents running around here...and some young people who are doing well...not all---but many...you cannot argue with that...
  - don't underestimate the power of even a little thing...
- that's the beauty of that little phrase in **verse 13 – began to recognize them as having been with Jesus**
- **there are some important questions that flow out of that, aren't there?...**
  1. have you “been with Jesus” in the sense that you have trusted Christ as Savior and Lord – He is obviously in the process of transforming you?
  2. are you “with Jesus” on a regular basis?...[cf. spending time daily in the Word and prayer]...in a way that produces a clear difference in the way you live every day...

### 3. would others have reason to say this about you?

- and here's another important piece of this puzzle...as God accomplishes His transforming work over time...the powerful message...

#### **C. Gives us confidence.**

- that is a key theme in this passage...
- not arrogance, but a settled conviction that Jesus is alive and He is worthy of our allegiance...
- did you see it in the text?...
- **v. 13 – as they observed the confidence of Peter and John...**
- **vv. 19-20 - Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.**
- **v. 29 - And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence,**

- so in verse 22, they're released from prison...and what do they do?...
- they get together, and they connect their experiences to the message...and that continues to bind them together because they have...

#### **III. A Message of Direction**

- you might have expected them to be all in an uproar about the fact that they are being persecuted and threatened for their faith...that's not at all what's happening here...
- because they open their Bibles...and they say, what we're experiencing is exactly what was predicted in God's Word...

#### **A. Grounded in the Scriptures.**

- Our commitment to Christ and His Word will never change...
  - and over time, that garners a level of respect from a watching world...because they keep changing their view on the origin and nature of man...
    - so they believe this about how the human race developed, and we believe what Scripture says...
    - and then they discard their position and believe something else, and we believe what Scripture says...
    - and they change again...and change again...
    - and over time, it's what Paul said about men and women in the last days... **2 Timothy 3:7 - always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.**

- the same is true with the nature of man – are we doing self-love today, or codependency, or multiple personality disorder, or drug therapy—what's the flavor of the month?...
- the Scriptures give us direction...and when you get a group of people heading in that same biblical direction...it draws us together...especially when it's...

#### **B. Empowered by the Spirit.**

- there is a delightful balance here between the objective Word of God [on one hand] coupled with the subjective work of the Spirit [on the other]...so we read...
  - **Acts 4:24-25 - And when they heard *this*, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the Holy Spirit, *through* the mouth of**

**our father David Your servant, said, “Why did the Gentiles rage, and the people devise futile things?”**

- so they weren't thrown off kilter by this persecution because they knew their Bibles predicted this very thing...and they also understood that their Bibles, and their ability to properly apply and live it was a supernatural matter for sure...
- and please think again about this whole matter of being drawn together...
  - people who are used to depending on the Spirit of God together are going to be knit together into a very close group of people...that's what happens when everybody is on the same page...
  - we want the Scripture to be our guide...
  - and are depending on the Holy Spirit to help us follow it...

- and that is exactly the way we see this chapter end...illustrating that we also have...

#### **IV. A Message of Unity**

##### **A. They were of one heart and soul – v. 32**

- so they shared with one another to be sure everyone's needs were met...

##### **B. They continued to proclaim the message.**

**Acts 4:33 - And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.**

##### **C. They gave sacrificially so that the mission could be advanced.**

- **Acts 4:36-37 - Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.**

***“WHEN A MAN KNOWS HOW TO DO SOMETHING,” PABLO PICASSO TOLD A FRIEND< “HE CEASES BEING A MAN WHEN HE STOPS DOING IT.”***