

10-18-20 Believers Reaction, God Response, and Church Results

Acts 4:23-36

What would be your reaction if you won a million dollars?

How would you respond if someone else won a million dollars?

What would you do with all that money?

Today we are going to look at how the early Christians reacted when tough times, persecution came their way. Also, look at how God responded to their reaction and the results of when born-again man does right and God rewards.

The book of Acts is a (how-to) for the church. It is our SOP (standard operating procedure) and a written testimony of how God desires the bride of His Son to carry itself.

It is no secret; the church of Jesus Christ is under attack. It always has been and through the Millennium reign of Christ, it will continue.

When Covid-19 first hit us back in February we didn't know much about it, doctors and scientist are learning more and more every day. I remember how extreme many were, how scared we were. We felt at that time it was a good thing to shut the church down and submit to the lock downs. I remember those on the other side of the argument that were mad at pastors that shut down. I had been told by more that one well intentioned person, you are putting man's will above God.

I preached from **Romans 13**, and stated it was our responsibility to submit to those who have authority over us. I still believe our heart and motives were correct. I and many believed that the government was doing what **Romans 13:3**, "**For rulers are not a terror to good works (conduct), but to evil.**"

By the way, we must be balanced. The gospel and life of Jesus Christ was about balance. We must be careful to not swing to far either direction. Always striving for the middle, that's where truth and love are.

We must be careful of knee jerk reactions. We, I must strive for balanced reactions. Knee jerk reactions can lead us into a place where we sin, push people away and hurt our testimony. That's what I love about the men God has put here at Bethel. They are measured with their reaction, balanced.

Today, 7 months later, I can say to you that I am not sure if following the governments ways are correct anymore. Now, don't overreact with that! I am saying considering what we are seeing today, I am really starting to believe the church, people not following orders to the T, are being abused. I can't say that our rulers are, "**are not a terror to good works (conduct), but to evil.**"

 Read Governor Cuomo's quotes about the church and it's gathering.

What will be our reaction? I don't know, but I do know where I can go to find the answer, God's Word.

Read Acts 4:23-30

I. Christian Reaction (verses 23-30)

A. Get Together (Gather)

- I would say our first response should be to gather with our "idous," our own company of people.

- I want to be sensitive and I want you to hear me. I believe when things come against God's people we need to gather together in person. Again, hear me, no one wants anyone to physically be here, IF, they don't feel safe, or are vulnerable. If you are in a certain age category or have underlining medical conditions, please stay home.
- But if you are staying away, or choosing to watch online because of convenience, or fear of the "what if's" in life, I want to challenge you to get into God's Word and seek if that is correct or not.
- Are you sure fear and convenience is biblical reason? My prayer is that through my challenge each one will search God's Word and let Him answer it.

Hebrew 10:25, "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

2 Timothy 1:7, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

What happened when the early persecuted church gathered?

B. Prayer, (v.24-30)

C. Remembered and searched God's Word to get in line with His will.

- Their desire was to hear from their Heavenly Father. I remember watching as God worked on September 30th. I was in a place of prayer and panic. I wasn't sure what to do next. I couldn't answer my phone, all I could think, is how do we recover from this?! Maybe the best thing is for the church to separate itself from me. Just an overwhelming sense of dazed and confused. Then Peter reached out and asked if we could have a prayer meeting in the parking lot. My first thought was, no, there have been reporters in and out all afternoon. Then I felt a calmer, peaceful thought, yes, we must gather, we need prayer, we need to seek out His will in all this. Kim and I snuck out and listened to God's people, who came with not much notice, standing in the parking lot, praying for us, the church, and His will. It was a powerful and beautiful thing at the same time.
- When persecution comes at us, we must not run away, we must run to our company. We must pray, remember His word, and seek His will.
- This is the reaction that God desires of His church.

II. God's Response (verses 31-32)

A. Filling them with the Holy Spirit.

B. Gave them Boldness

C. Made them one

- The word “believed” reminds us that the oneness we have is because we have believed. To “believe” means to “be firmly persuaded, to rely on, and to trust in.” If you have not yet believed in Christ through the new birth, then you don’t yet belong to His church.
- All those who were born again were bound to each other in “one heart and one soul.” The heart represents our desires, and the soul is the immaterial part of our being. This has the idea of having harmony in thought and affection, head, and heart. Since they shared a common love, they shared a common life. Because they believed in one Lord and had one Spirit indwelling each of them, they were one with each other.
- The early church exhibited oneness from the very beginning. **Acts 1:14 says, “all these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer...”** **Acts 2:1** tells us on the Day of Pentecost **“they were all together in one place...”** **Acts 2:44** says: **“And all who believed were together...”** This is in the imperfect tense, meaning they made it a practice of gathering together all the time. This goes along with what we learned last week about the importance of being with, idous “your people.”
- God’s heart has always been for harmony. **Jeremiah 32:39, “then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them.”**
- When we operate in unity of heart and soul with other believers, we are an answer to the prayer of Jesus found in **John 17:21: “That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”**
- Are you exhibiting oneness with other believers? Are you in one accord or are you spreading discord? Is there anyone you need to forgive or ask forgiveness from?

Believers reaction, prayer, remembering God’s Word, searching for His will, led to:

God Responding by, filling them with the Holy Spirit, gave them boldness, and made them one (unity)

III. Church Results (verses 33-37)

A. The church extended themselves.

- We’re called to exhibit oneness and secondly, we’re challenged to live outside of ourselves to serve others. We’re to extend ourselves in two directions – to the lost and to the found.
- Gave the gospel to the lost. **Verse 33, “And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.”**
- The word “great” is used twice in this verse and is the Greek word megas, which means, “at the highest level, superlative and impressive.” When the apostles gave testimony about the resurrection, which was offensive to the religious leaders, they experienced great power.
- We’re to witness in the power of God because we have the provision of the grace of God. The giving of the gospel with great power resulted in great grace being upon them all.
- Gave of their best. **Read verses 34-35.** The phrase **“laid them at the apostles’ feet”** is in the imperfect tense, meaning they did it over and over, again and again. They trusted the authority and integrity of the apostles to distribute the proceeds as needs came up.

One pastor points out these first followers demonstrated three things:

- Servanthood. Everyone placed themselves in service to others.
- Selflessness. They placed the needs of others ahead of their own greed.
- Sacrifice. They gave up their precious possessions to help those in poverty.
- Someone said, “Pray that your heart is loosened in relationship to things and tightened in its relationship to people.” Persecution often strips us of our materialistic focus because it helps us remember things don’t last, but people do.
- Some think this is evidence of communism or socialism, but it was a voluntary response to specific needs. It’s not “what’s yours is mine and I’ll take it,” but instead, “what’s mine is yours and I’ll share it.” The early church experienced organic oneness, not mandated oneness.
- Simply put, because they were committed to each other they contributed to one other.

1 John 3:17, “But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”

- Became the best. **Read verse 36-37.** Encourage others.
- The Bible not only gives us exhortations to obey; we’re also given examples to emulate. Among the thousands of believers in the new church, there’s a guy named Josès who stands out because of how he intentionally encouraged others.
- Those who knew him best called him Barnabas because this nickname means “encouragement.”
- Not everyone can be like Peter and John, but we can all be like Barnabas and encourage others. Interestingly, his name is used 25 times in Acts.

1. He was a generous giver

- **2. He was grace-based.** In **Acts 11**, we read about the explosive growth of the church in Antioch. Recognizing that these new believers needed to be mentored and disciplined, what do you think the church in Jerusalem did? They sent the Son of Encouragement to Antioch, over 300 miles.
- When Barnabas arrived, **verse 23** tells us what he looked for: **“When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose.”** He saw evidence of God’s grace everywhere and because of that, he was glad. This gladness then led him to encourage and exhort these new believers to keep on going with the Lord. Grace led to gladness which led to growth.

- Are you a discourager or an encourager? Are you a grace-giver or a fault-finder?
- When people see you coming, do they take cover, or do they try to get close to you?

- **3. He was faithful.** **Acts 11:24**, **“For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.”** Barnabas was the real deal. And as a result, **“many people were added to the Lord.”** The way you live can bring others to life.

- **4. He was a team player.** Barnabas knew that he needed help in Antioch, he went and got Paul to help him minister. Barnabas was a man of humility.



5. **He was a forgiver of the fallen.** Working as a team is not always easy. Paul, Barnabas, and a young man named John Mark ministered together previously and according to **Acts 13:13**, Mark bailed on them and went back to Jerusalem. When Paul prepared to take another missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to take Mark along. Paul did not think very highly of Mark and refused to have him on the team. **Acts 15:39** says regarding Paul and Barnabas “...**there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other.**” Barnabas took Mark and went one direction and Paul settled on Silas and went a different route.
- Don't miss the significance of this. Barnabas was willing to have conflict with Paul to forgive and restore a fallen brother. Paul had labeled Mark a loser but because Barnabas was a lover, he never gave up on him. The only label he put on Mark was this: You matter to God and therefore you matter to me. We know from Scripture that because Barnabas poured courage into Mark, this discouraged and defeated man became a contributing member of the team once again.
 - Paul eventually realized that Mark mattered to his own ministry. Listen to Paul's words in 2 **Timothy 4:11, penned right before he died: “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.”**
 - Brothers and sisters, is there someone you have written off? Have you labeled anyone a loser? It's time to give grace and stop gossiping.

Conclusion

What will you do?

Do you know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord? He must be both.

“Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession. ... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.” -Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

Gather? Pray? Seek God's Will?

If we do this God will Respond!

He will fill you with the Holy Spirit, give you boldness, and make you one with His people.

The Result will be:

The Gospel will be our testimony, the church will a place of giving, the church will be its best.

- Gospel preachers/discipleship makers
- Givers
- Encouragers (extenders of grace)
- Faithful
- Team Players
- Forgivers