

Series: EXTREME

Text: Acts 3, 4

Title: "Boldly Witness"

Introduction: WELCOME, BACK ROADS CHURCH! Glad you're with us TODAY as we Continue with **"EXTREME"**! EXTREME DEVOTION ... The ONLY WAY to TRULY Follow JESUS is at the EXTREME! There is no half-apple following of Jesus. Following JESUS is ALL IN or ALL OUT ... You are EITHER in a CLOSE RELATIONSHIP with JESUS or you are NOT. So far ... PASSIONATE WORSHIP and EXTRAVAGANT LOVE.

Today, EXTREME DEVOTION shows up in our BOLD WITNESS ... of JESUS!

So, here's the PROBLEM with Jesus CALLING US to be WITNESSES in this LIFE: Many JESUS FOLLOWERS DON'T understand WHY ... *"Why can't we just believe what we want and not pressure others into believing what we believe? Why can't we just leave people alone? Why do we have to MEDDLE in people's lives?"*

Here's WHERE that thought process COMES FROM: MOST in our culture BELIEVE in a "GOOD GOD" surrounded by "GOOD PEOPLE" and WHEN we DIE, we all go to a "GOOD PLACE" ... *"She/He is in a better place..."* TOO MANY THINK everyone BELIEVES in the SAME GOD, but we have different PATHS to GET to GOD. Many BELIEVE ALL Religions LAND you in the SAME PLACE ... *"just pick whichever one is most comfortable to you and I'll meet you in heaven."* THIS WORLDVIEW causes ... *"Just live and let live... Stop shoving your beliefs down other people's throats!"*

So, WHY do I need to WITNESS BOLDLY? WHY do we NEED to TELL OTHERS ... it's SO DIFFICULT ... for THEM, AND for ME! CAN'T we just LEAVE OTHER PEOPLE ALONE? Short Answer = NO! JESUS COMMISSIONED US to **"GO into ALL the WORLD and MAKE DISCIPLES."** BTW – IF we are NOT DISCIPLES, we can NOT GO and MAKE DISCIPLES. And HOW will they KNOW WE are HIS DISCIPLES? IF we LOVE ONE ANOTHER! IF we do NOT TELL THEM, they will NOT KNOW. IF we do NOT SHOW THEM, they will NOT CARE! *"People do not care what we know until they know we care."* CUTE, and TRUE!

TODAY, we are using the FIRST CHAPTERS of the BOOK of ACTS to REMIND US of the IMPORTANCE of WITNESSING to OTHERS about JESUS. THEN, we're going to PUSH FORWARD in HISTORY.

Let's PICK UP in ACTS 4 ... Jesus DIED, BURIED, RESURRECTED and ASCENDED to HEAVEN. ACTS 1, Luke (the author) ... JESUS spoke to the Disciples/APOSTLES and then disappeared into the clouds. ACTS 2 = The Apostles were filled with the SPIRIT of CHRIST and the CHURCH Jesus CLAIMED his Apostles would START, was started. ACTS 3 = the Apostles are ... BOLDLY WITNESSING.

Let's START THERE. ACTS 3 ... I need to GO FAST. YOU can READ IT (next steps).

The POWER and the PREACHING

WRITE that DOWN. PETER and JOHN go to the Temple for 3pm prayer service. A man LAME FROM BIRTH is carried in and set at the GATE of the Temple so he could make (BEG for) money (violin case). Lame Guy asks Peter and John for a little something... PETER and JOHN stare him down and then Peter says, **"Look at us!"** (weird) LAME GUY from BIRTH looks up, expecting some money. Peter says, **"I don't have gold and silver. BUT I'll give you what I have."** GREAT! More Advice! I've heard it all before...

Here it is ... **ACTS 3:6 = *But Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!"***

PETER HELPS Mr. LAME GUY from Birth UP and ... PICTURE this moment when a GUY who has NEVER experienced the use of his LEGS can SUDDENLY (not after months of physical therapy) WALK ... HE WALKS ... HE RUNS ... HE JUMPS ... HE PRAISES GOD!

WHEN the PEOPLE going into the Temple REALIZE THIS is the GUY who BEGS here EVERY DAY, they are ASTOUNDED! They ALL RUSH OUT to SOLOMON'S Colonnade (Portico, Porch) on the Temple Mount where FORMERLY LAME GUY is HANGING with PETER and JOHN. Now, PETER sees an OPPORTUNITY to PREACH! AND the CROWD was ready to listen. PETER HEALED a MAN! He SHOWED a GUY he did NOT KNOW the LOVE of CHRIST! NOW, people are READY to LISTEN!

Peter PREACHES a SERMON about JESUS... PROBLEM = RELIGIONS LEADERS FOLLOW the CROWD and COMMOTION and HEAR PETER and JOHN (followers of the Dead Carpenter) TALKING about JESUS! ...IN THE TEMPLE!

The RELIGIOUS LEADERS think this is a PROBLEM. ***"It's bad enough YOU still BELIEVE in JESUS. It's WORSE that you TALK ABOUT HIM with OTHERS."***

PETER and JOHN are ARRESTED, PUT in JAIL until MORNING. BUT listeners BELIEVE and the CHURCH NUMBERS over 5,000, not counting women and children!

AFTER a NIGHT in JAIL, PETER and JOHN are BROUGHT in FRONT of the RELIGIOUS LEADERS and PETER PREACHES AGAIN! The RELIGIOUS Leaders do NOT know WHAT to DO. They send PETER and JOHN OUT and DISCUSS ... ***"What are we going to do? They're still talking about that carpenter from Nazareth!"***

They DECIDE to WARN Peter and John and RELEASE them. Surely, a NIGHT in JAIL will STOP THEM from TALKING about JESUS! They call Peter and John back in and tell them: ***"STOP TALKING ABOUT JESUS!"*** **ACTS 4:18 = *So they called the apostles back in and commanded them never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.***

The REASON We Have to TALK

This is the SAME MESSAGE we get in our culture TODAY (check the media): ***"You raise your children how you want to but quit talking about it. IF YOU want to FOLLOW Jesus, go ahead, but quit trying to convince other people because YOU'RE CAUSING TROUBLE. Keep it to yourself!"*** **ACTS 4:19 = *But Peter and John replied, "Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him?"***

Now, if you ARE or ARE NOT a Christian, PLEASE LISTEN CAREFULLY to this next part. Acts 4:20 = ***"We cannot stop talking about everything we BELIEVE to be true."*** Right? NO!

Peter and John couldn't shut up, NOT because they had a different belief system. This wasn't ***"I believe THIS and YOU believe THAT. Whose makes more sense?"*** This was NOT a DEBATE about MORALITY or THEOLOGY or IDEALS! It was ... **ACTS 4:20 = *We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard.***

Peter and John CAN'T SHUT UP, because of what has HAPPENED! ... In THAT CITY (Jerusalem)... In the LAST FEW WEEKS! It's FRESH on their MINDS and HEARTS ... we're NOT DEBATING PHILOSOPHY, we're TELLING FACTS!

WHAT did they SEE and HEAR that caused JOHN to STICK to His BELIEFS even when he was BOILED in a VAT of OIL and EXILED to the Island of Patmos? What was SO HUGE that PETER would NOT DENY IT to SAVE his LIFE as he was CRUCIFIED on a cross upside down? WHAT WAS IT? We FIND OUT from Peter's SERMONETTE he gave the religious leaders on the MORNING AFTER they were arrested and spent the night in JAIL.

THE COUNCIL has a QUESTION for Peter and John... *“There’s a guy out there who had never walked. Now, he is training for the Jerusalem track team. We cannot deny he is healed. And we know that you guys did not pull this off on your own, so here is our question...”* ACTS 4:7 = *They brought in the two disciples and demanded, “By what power, or in whose name, have you done this?”* *“We want the TRUTH!”*

The TRUTH

“It’s not by your power, we know that. BUT, by WHAT POWER or IN WHOSE NAME is this possible?” And PETER DIVES IN with what HE KNOWS is the TRUTH...

ACTS 4:8-10 = *Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers and elders of our people, are we being questioned today because we’ve done a good deed for a crippled man? Do you want to know how he was healed?”* A little SARCASM about being thrown in jail for healing a crippled man (no good deed goes unpunished) ... THEN, a little TEASE: *“Do you want the TRUTH? Do you want the TRUTH? You can’t handle the TRUTH! BRACE YOURSELVES FELLAS!”* DON’T MISS THIS... *10 Let me clearly state to all of you and to all the people of Israel that he was healed by the powerful name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the man you crucified but whom God raised from the dead.*

BTW ... That was JUST a FEW DAY/WEEKS AGO! REMEMBER? WE DO! JOHN and I KNEW He was The SON of the LIVING GOD while we TRAVELED and MINISTERED with HIM for about 3 YEARS. WE had it CONFIRMED when we STUCK our HEADS into an EMPTY GRAVE! THEN, JESUS, in a RESURRECTED BODY came and TALKED to US and INVITED US to TELL EVERYONE about HIM!

Here's what we KNOW ... NOT, what we BELIEVE ... what we KNOW ... ACTS 4:12 = *There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.* (REPEAT) Peter tells them that the power of Jesus is not just about healing a man who had never walked before ... Jesus is the SAVIOR of the WORLD! There is NO OTHER NAME that WE can be SAVED by...

It’s NO LONGER about living up to EXPECTATIONS to EARN your WAY into HEAVEN. It’s NOT about FOLLOWING all the intricate RULES of RELIGION and sacrificing animals for forgiveness ... It’s now about a BELIEF in One Name ... JESUS!

AFTER their ARREST and JAIL Time (with a THREAT of EXECUTION) ... the FOLLOWERS of JESUS CHOSE NOT to PRAY for SAFETY. They PRAYED ... ACTS 4:29 = *And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word.* They PRAYED for BOLDNESS. Those PRAYERS CONTINUED in the GENERATIONS of JESUS-FOLLOWERS that FOLLOWED.

Now, WE AGREE CHRISTIANITY made it OUT of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd CENTURY ... BUT HOW? The ROMAN LAWYER TURNED CHRISTIAN, TERTULLIAN, wrote in his famous work, *APOLOGETICUS*, that in the 1st CENTURY the CHRISTIANS were BLAMED for ANYTHING that went WRONG in the EMPIRE. Famine, Flooding, Loss in Battle, Disease ... Those HAPPENED in the EMPIRE BECAUSE TOO MANY were CONVERTING to CHRISTIANITY, and the ROMAN GODS were ANGRY. So, IF ANYTHING went WRONG, the ROMANS would SACRIFICE the CHRISTIANS. *“The Christians to the Lions!”*

As TIME went FORWARD, the CHRISTIANS continued to *“WITNESS BOLDLY,”* but NOT HOW WE might THINK. Last Week = INFANTICIDE and RESCUING kids. MORE HISTORIC PROOF of how CHRISTIANITY SPREAD across the Roman Empire...

Around 110 AD, while TRAJAN was the EMPEROR, the Roman Empire experienced a NUMBER of SETBACKS. TIME to BLAME those CHRISTIANS! So, he ISSUED an EDICT to his GOVERNORS to ARREST and IMPRISON / EXECUTE Christians in their REGION.

Emperor TRAJAN and PLINY The Younger

PLINY was Governor of BYTHINIA (Turkey) and when he RECEIVED this EDICT, he was CONFUSED. It lacked INSTRUCTIONS on SPECIFIC CRIMES Christians were to be CHARGED with and to WHAT EXTENT they could be ***“INVESTIGATED”*** (tortured / killed).

SO ... PLINY sent a LETTER to TRAJAN with QUESTIONS. But, BEFORE he sent it, PLINY did a little ***“RESEARCH”*** on his own. He ARRESTED a few Christians and QUESTIONED them. Here's what he wrote to TRAJAN about what he DISCOVERED ...

“The sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god...” All PLINY could FIND: they MET before SUNUP on SUNDAY (first day of work week) to SING a HYMN (Christian theology learned). Back to PLINY: ***“...and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but...”***

This was confusing for Pliny. CRIME? Now, this NEXT PART is the BEST ... WEEKLY, they BOUND themselves to a CODE of CONDUCT that REFLECTED The LAW of CHRIST ... what JESUS COMMANDED in the UPPER ROOM ... ***“... not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so.”*** PLINY had a DILEMMA. The CHRISTIANS in his province were the BEST CITIZENS in his PROVINCE!

PLINY decided to FURTHER his INVESTIGATION. ***“I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else by depraved, excessive superstition.”*** Likely, the superstition was RESURRECTION.

50 years before this, PAUL wrote a LETTER to the CHURCHES in THESSALONICA that had CIRCULATED among CHRISTIANS ... ***1 THESSALONIANS 4:11-12 = Make it your goal to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we instructed you before. 12Then people who are not believers will respect the way you live.***

MIND your OWN BUSINESS and LOVE PEOPLE who do NOT THINK they DESERVE IT! Let's do THAT AGAIN. IT SEEMS to WORK!

Back to PLINY'S Epistle to TRAJAN ... ***“I therefore postponed the investigation and hastened to consult you. For the matter seemed to me to warrant consulting you, especially because ...”*** DON'T MISS THIS: ***“...especially because of the number involved. For many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes are and will be endangered. For the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms.”***

Less than 3 GENERATIONS after JESUS DEATH at the HANDS of the ROMANS, so MANY Roman CITIZENS embraced this NEW ***“SUPERSTITION”*** that a Roman Governor was CONCERNED about HOW MANY ARRESTS He'd have to MAKE if REQUIRED to arrest ALL who were ASSOCIATED with JESUS.

Now WHAT?

I say we DO what JESUS COMMANDS ... what FOLLOWERS of JESUS DID in the EARLY CHURCH ... we MIND our OWN BUSINESS and LOVE PEOPLE regardless of their DESERVING IT. You know, LIKE JESUS LOVES YOU! WHAT if THAT was the ONLY CHARGE AGAINST US as JESUS FOLLOWERS? ***“The PROBLEM is ...THEY LOVE PEOPLE who do NOT DESERVE IT ... CONSISTENTLY!”***

THAT will CHANGE the WORLD! Let's be CONTAGIOUS AGAIN and GO into ALL the WORLD and MAKE DISCIPLES by ACTING as DISCIPLES ... People who have a LORD and we are NOT GREATER than HIM. Let's LOVE PEOPLE and IF we are NOT SURE WHO to LOVE or HOW? Just MIND your OWN BUSINESS and WASH some FEET ... THAT will WITNESS BOLDLY! Let's Pray!

Next Steps: *Memorize Acts 4:12 and/or Acts 4:20*
Read Acts 3-4
Invite Someone to Easter Worship NEXT WEEK!

Hosting (Closing)

It's been a GREAT DAY here at BACK ROADS... Glad you've been here with us!

- NEXT STEPS on your CONNECTION CARD (**FULLY FILLED OUT!!**)
- AND when our ushers come around to RECEIVE our OFFERING
- You can drop that card in the offering basket.

IF you are a First-Time Guest with us today

- We are so glad you joined us ... And we have a GIFT for you.

It's this book "**UNSHAKABLE**" and it's at the BACK TABLE / By the DOORS...

- all you need to do is HIT "**SEND**" your COMPLETED Connection Card

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As our ushers GET READY to come forward

- I just want to remind you ... STEWARDSHIP is DISCIPLESHIP ... we RECEIVE an OFFERING EVERY Sunday BECAUSE it's BIBLICAL ... AND it HELPS us GROW in our FAITH!
- STEWARDSHIP VERSE ... ACTS 4:12 = ***There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.***
- FIRST of our EARNINGS go back to the ONE who Blessed us in the first place! That's why WE/I do Automated Giving! I get paid ... the TITHE comes OUT FIRST!
- God's plan for BUILDING His Church was through TITHING and GIVING of the FOLLOWERS ... Share the GOOD NEWS! To REFRESH OTHERS!
- As Developing Followers of Jesus Christ, WE need to KNOW what the BIBLE says about GIVING ... NOT just what we THINK it should say.
- ***MONEY is a HEART ISSUE.*** And GOD wants what is BEST for your HEART! Listen, if GOD LOVES US so much that HE is willing to GIVE UP His OWN SON FOR US, WHY would GOD LEAD us ASTRAY in FINANCES?! USHERS ...
- Next Week: ***EASTER SUNDAY ... BE BOLD and ASK SOMEONE to COME! NEW SERIES KICK-OFF ... HOW do we TAKE GOD to WORK / SCHOOL?***

"Truth without Grace is Fundamentalism (Brutality). Grace without Truth is Sentimentalism (Hypocrisy)."

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