

Acts (Part 3) – Ministry in Jerusalem

Matt Chandler – February 23, 2014

If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab them. Acts, chapters 3 and 4, is where we'll be today. I said in the beginning of this series that my hope and the purpose of us walking through the book of Acts is actually to show the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. We know that's actually been accomplished because we're here. Right? If this starts in Jerusalem and we're here, then the gospel has made its way to the ends of the earth. In fact, to this day, it continues to push its way even farther to the ends of the earth.

What I want to do for the next couple of weeks is I want us to look at the church in Jerusalem, and I want to show you some things about the church in Jerusalem that are true about the church in any generation at any time. My hope there is they will build confidence and boldness in us to trust the Lord as these things have been true about the church and around the church since the very beginning.

Before we dive into Acts, chapter 3, I need to lay Hunter Hall before you. I announced a few weeks ago that we have purchased a building in Plano. We're doing due diligence on that property now and have plans to launch a Plano Campus in the future (in the next year for sure once we figure out all that will need to take place).

We unanimously as elders have decided Hunter Hall is the man to lead that campus, but in our structure, our system of government, campus pastors are elders, and elders must be presented before the body. You get 30 days to give us a reason why he is biblically unfit for the role of elder. If you just don't like him, that doesn't matter, but if you have biblical reasons why he is disqualified... If you're not sure where you would find biblical reasons, you can find those in 1 Timothy or in Titus.

Hunter, why don't you come out here? I'm going to put him, lay him, before you. Then how protocol works is for the next 30 days, you have those days to email in why this man is not qualified. I've known him since he was in high school and have done ministry with him for a long, long time. In

fact, when I was doing itinerant ministry, Hunter was with us in the band that traveled with me (or I guess maybe I traveled with the band, depending on who is telling the story).

Then ultimately, I got to watch him grow through multiple different things. He has a beautiful family, godly wife, gorgeous children. I think we have a picture of them. This man has been tested. He has a little boy, a little girl, and then twins. If you've had one kid and thought, "Oh my Lord, how would you do two at one time," Hunter can tell you. Moving forward, there are 30 days for you to tell us why he is not biblically qualified.

We feel he is. We've watched him for an extended period of time, but we're not with him 24 hours a day. If you ran into him at the shops and he punched you in the face and took your wife's purse, we just don't know that, and we need to know it. Thirty days from today, from there we'll simply announce he is now an elder. Then we'll have more information about the Plano Campus rolling out from there, including who is on staff there, when we'll soft launch, when we'll hard launch, and all that type of information.

For this morning, will you join me in praying for Hunter, praying over his family? Anytime you rise up a bit in leadership in regard to serving the Lord and serving the Lord's people, the spiritual climate just changes. I want to pray just protection over him, a blessing over him, over his marriage, over his children, over his leadership and the wisdom it will require to lead people. Pray with me on this.

Father, I thank you for this man. I thank you how you've allowed me to just watch him grow in his love for you, love his wife well, serve his children well. I thank you, Father, that as I read your Word, I see in him all you would have an elder be. I pray a blessing over his marriage. Thank you for Becky, for her giftedness, for her godliness.

Father, I thank you for the little souls you've entrusted to him and Becky and pray all four of his children would trust in you early and fully. It wouldn't be a love for you built around Hunter or Becky's love for you, but it would be their love for you very early on. Their story would be they don't remember what it's like to not love you, long for you, and seek to follow after you. I pray for protection over his family and pray for wisdom, spiritual authority, and power as he seeks to lead and love your people in the Plano area. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

All right. We're not going to spend a lot of time in Acts 3, but I do want to tell you the story. When we left off two weeks ago, what we saw is God had created a covenant people, the first distinctively Christian church in the history of the world. They were marked by really three traits. The Bible tells us they were devoted to the apostles' teaching and to one another. They were marked by devotion. Then the Bible tells us they were a people of glad and generous hearts.

From there, they're meeting day by day. They're breaking bread together. They're sharing with one another. They have all things in common. You get this really beautiful picture of what it looks like to be the people of God. That's how chapter 2 ends. Chapter 3, the story is Peter and John head up to the temple. As they're walking to the temple, they pass a lame beggar who is in his forties (or at least he is older than 40). He is asking Peter and John for alms, and Peter stops and bends down and asks the guy to look right at him.

Now that's weird. It's not awkward when I do it to 1,500. I'm like, "Look at me." For 1,500, that's not odd or awkward. But if we're at coffee and in the middle of our conversation, I'm like, "Look at me right here; look right here," that's weird. Peter gets down. He is like, "Look at me. We don't have any alms, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus, stand up and walk."

The lame beggar who had been at this gate for 40-something years pops up and leaps (according to the text, because wouldn't you?) into the temple praising God. Of course, he draws a crowd because the text is going to tell us he had been sitting at that gate every day. A crowd gathers, and they're all praising God. Peter is not wasting the opportunity, so he preaches his second sermon of the distinctively Christian era. He preaches the second sermon.

Here's what's important to note about the second sermon: it's very similar to the first. That makes my heart happy. It's very similar to the first, and once again, God meets men where they are. He tells them the truth about themselves. He offers them pardon and demands a response. Then from there, we'll pick it up in Acts, chapter 4, starting in verse 1.

"And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening."

Listen to verse 4, because it's crazy. **"But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of men came to about five thousand."** Peter is preaching his second sermon. Near the end of his sermon, he is actually arrested. As they're dragging him out arrested, 5,000 men respond to the gospel and begin to praise God for the offer of pardon.

If you try to get your mind around that, this is like in the middle of this sermon if all of a sudden officers come out and they flex-cuff me and drag me off the stage. While they're dragging me off the stage, I offer the invitation, "So come forward now if you want some of this." I'm just guessing few of us are going to go, "I'd like to maybe be arrested" and come forward. Yet so powerful is the Holy Spirit's presence here at Solomon's portico that 5,000 men (maybe 10,000-12,000 people) join the chorus of the saints.

Yet the thing I want us to dial into today about what's always true about the church and why we have to, in some ways, really be on our guard is that whenever the gospel of Jesus Christ is faithfully proclaimed, there will be men and women who receive that offer for pardon and rejoice in the Lord. There will be those, regardless of how you go about it, who are offended by the idea they need a pardon and seek to marginalize, persecute, or destroy those who would embrace such an ideology.

It has always been true. It will always be true. It is true today. There will always be those who hear and praise God. If you remember what we said two weeks ago, we said God meets men and women where they are. He shows up where we are. The first church was birthed in a festival celebrating the barley harvest. The first Christian church exploded out of, basically, Mardi Gras. No one saw that one coming.

Then here once again they aren't looking for Jesus when Jesus finds them. God meets men where they are, and he always tells them the truth about themselves. Although many get offended by what is true about them, for many of us, those of us who repent and find our hope in Christ, God telling us the truth about us is like a warm blanket, because we're finally outed. It feels good to no longer be hidden.

The way I tried to flesh this out a couple of weeks ago was if God had shown up and looked into my heart and told me I was awesome, I'd have no hope. For those who know they're weak... Is that not one of the most common accusations against all religious people but especially those of us who are Christians? We're weak-minded. We need a crutch.

Here's the crazy thing. I usually don't mind secular arguments, but here's what I'll tell you about that one. It's true. Praise God that by his grace, he let us know we were weak rather than allowing us to continue to operate under the façade of strength. Listen. If you're addicted, if you're depressed, if you're angry, if you're wrestling with anxiety, if you know you're selfish, if you're breaking up all your relationships, if you know you are easily prone to rage and violence... On and on and on I could go.

When God shows up and tells you the truth about you, that you are in rebellion, you cannot fix you, you make a crummy God and, "I have wrath toward your rebellion against me," and then offers you pardon, you go, "Oh, thank God! That makes sense!" Whereas if your marriage is a train wreck and God shows up and goes, "No, you're nailing it," think about how defeating and life sucking that would be.

I mean, you're exhausted trying to make your marriage work, exhausted trying not to lash out at your children, exhausted trying to break addiction patterns, exhausted trying not to fly off the handle. Exhausted! God's word to you is you're great? Do you know how defeating and awful that would be? Praise God that he shows up, and he goes, "No, you're a fool. You're trusting in you, and you can't do this."

That's great news because I was already trying to be better. I was trying to break those habits. I was trying to break away from what came so naturally to me. I couldn't figure out why I couldn't become a better version of me. Then praise God when God found me where he found me, he didn't tell me I was doing great. "Keep trying, kid." No, he really came up. There were some harsh things said to my heart by the Lord in love.

Then here's what's crazy. On top of completely outing me... "You have a lustful, wicked heart. You're a liar. You love the applause of men. You are a slave to your own desires. You are a foul-mouthed, hyper-aggressive, don't-care-about-people, all-about-you buffoon. Here's your pardon in Jesus Christ."

Hear what I said. The declaration of God through Christ over the life of believers is not that we're innocent but rather that we're pardoned. We're not innocent; we're pardoned. Our crimes have been paid for in full. Where that happens, there will always be a group of people who hear that, respond to it, and celebrate it. They are those who are aware of their weaknesses. They are aware of their shortcomings.

To be aware of those things is a gift. I've tried to plead with you now for a decade: don't despise those things. I heard Ed Welch at one point say we get confused about sanctification because we think it looks like strength. In reality, it looks like weakness. To know you're weak is not a bad thing. To have a marriage that is difficult is not a bad thing if it gets you what you actually need. I mean, if you think about kingdom economics, Jesus' first sermon is not really a crowd-drawer.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are those who mourn..." I mean, this isn't how you build a big church, is it? "Happy are you when your soul feels bankrupt. Blessed are you when you mourn. Blessed are you when you are persecuted, when men say all sorts of evil against you because of my name." This is kingdom economics. Why are you blessed in those situations? Because you understand you need them, and you run *to* him, not *from* him. This is the blessed life. This is your best life now.

There will always be those who respond. Always. This should create a great deal of boldness and confidence in us because it means people will respond. All of them? Well, no. Not all will respond with, "That's great news!" There will be those who are offended by the idea of Jesus and the pardon.

Hear me. I'm not talking about those who would be offended by what we believe the Word of God says in regard to moral positions and posturing. I totally understand why someone would be offended by what we believe God teaches around sexuality, about what we believe God teaches around marriage. I totally understand why people would get angry about those things and lash out at Christians for those things.

But here's what you'll find. Oftentimes it's not even *that* they'll be offended by. It's Christ himself who is the stumbling block who is the one who brings the offense, because God meeting us where we are... The good news of the gospel is we are confronted in our sin. When God meets us where we are, here's what he says: "You don't belong in that chair. That little throne in your heart? That's mine."

"Well, no, it's mine."

"Well, since I created you, I have rights. By the way, haven't you done a pretty crummy job as the sovereign of your heart? Haven't you been a pretty terrible god? I mean, it seems to me everywhere you go, you're just jacking stuff up." So you have to punt the ball down the field continually that

there's this future place where you're going to be really happy because you know you're not there right now.

You're distracting yourself by buying into the lie that really full satisfaction is found down the field when you meet the mythical *one*, when you finally get *that* job, when you finally stop *this* behavior, when you're finally able to get these nice things, when you're finally able to not worry about *this*, when you're finally able to overcome your anxiety, overcome your depression, overcome this difficult relationship you're in.

You're just punting the ball down the field. You're not ending the game. The gospel shows up and says, "You're broken. You don't belong in that chair, and you can't fix yourself." That's offensive to those who are what Paul called himself "insolent opponents." An insolent opponent says, "I don't care about the facts. This is my position. I don't care about the facts; I just care about what I want and my position. Don't bring me facts." You'll see that right here with how they begin to respond to Peter and John. Let's look in verse 15.

"But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, "What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name."

Do you hear the insolent opponent there? Do you hear the fact that, "Hey, we can't deny that the power of Jesus Christ just healed this lame guy who has been begging at the gate for 40-something years. We can't deny it. It happened, but we don't want him to do it anymore"? Do you see the insolence in that? When I have met with non-believers, one of the things I always just try to draw out of our conversation is that the default of many is, "I don't want to believe, so let me find reasons not to believe."

It's the default posture of their heart. "I don't want to believe because I like being god. I don't want to believe because I want to do what I want to do. I don't want to believe because I know Christ is going to be Lord, and he is going to lead me to some places I don't necessarily want to go because I think I know better than he knows. So I don't want to believe."

The fundamental posture becomes, "Let me find reasons not to believe." Isn't this what they're doing? I mean, the evidence to believe is right there in front of them, and yet it does not ever enter their minds, "Maybe this is real." No, it's, "How do we crush this? How do we marginalize this? How do we make this look silly? How do we get rid of this? How do we make sure this dies? How do we make them look foolish?"

This is the posture of the heart of not only the Sadducees and the chief priests but also, if you're paying attention in the ministry of Jesus, the game the Pharisees and Sadducees would play with Jesus where they would ask him questions. He would answer their questions, and it never kind of clicked or occurred to them, "Maybe he is right." They would just get bested by him and then huddle up and try to think of the next question.

"What should we do about taxes, Jesus?"

"Does anybody have a coin? Whose image is on the coin?"

"Caesar's."

"Okay, well, give to Caesar that which is Caesar's. Give to God that which is God's."

Busted. Just checkmate. That's what happens when you're all-knowing sovereign God of the universe. You just don't lose a lot of arguments. From there then, they wouldn't go, "Gosh! Maybe he is who he says he is." Instead, they're like, "Dang it! He got us." They huddled back up.

One of the fundamental postures of the culture we are in with those who do not believe is, "I don't want to believe it. Let me find reasons to not believe" versus, "Let me figure out belief here." It's not a turning off of your mind. It is an engaging honesty. So you see they know. They're like, "Okay, what are we going to do here?" Verse 17:

"But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.' So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.'"

Peter finally nails it. Finally! I mean, hadn't he already failed this test? Hadn't he already denied Christ three times? In such a merciful act of grace, God gives him a chance to take the test again. This time, he passes. He doesn't deny. He doesn't waver at all. He was like, "Hey, you decide whether it's right for us to obey God rather than you, but I can't help speaking about what we've seen and heard."

I think the weight of this probably doesn't stick in our heads because we can't imagine the scenario in which we have been arrested, and we are now standing in front of the judge. The judge says to us, "You will no longer preach about, speak about, or say anything about Jesus the Christ." Our response is, "Hey, judge, I mean, you figure it out for yourself, but I'm going to keep talking about Jesus."

I mean, that's contempt of court, isn't it? On a bad day, that's a long time in prison. Yet here's the scenario Peter and John find themselves in. They're being threatened by the established power of their day. Let's keep reading. Verse 19:

"But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.' And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old."

Again, think of just all the lunacy involved in this particular situation where they have this massive evidence that what Christ is and who he is and what he has done is actually true. So true is it among the people that, to punish those who are preaching would seem so unjust to the crowd, they might rebel against their rulers.

They do nothing but threaten them further and then kick them out. This has always been the environment in which the church has existed. There are those who love the pardon offered, and there are those who are offended by the pardon to the point that they seek to marginalize, mock, persecute, or destroy those who have embraced to make much of the pardon.

In light of this, one of the questions you're going to have to wrestle with over and over and over again, one of the pulls you will feel, is the desire to have people like you rather than be men and women who are rooted in the gospel and, being rooted in the gospel, would risk some of the social

relationships you have, some of the places you are invited into, and some of the ways people interact with you.

I've told this story before. In fact, there are some people in the room who were at this party. I was at a party, and there was a guy at the party who was a Secret Service agent. You know, when you're at a party where you don't know a lot of people, the questions are very similar. You know, "So what do you do? Do you live in the area?"

What would happen is when people would come up to this guy and say, "What do you do?" he would be like, "I'm in the Secret Service." They'd immediately go, "Oh my gosh. Let's talk about that. Have you guarded *this*? Have you ever killed anybody?" All these questions. People would then ask me what I did. I would say, "I'm a pastor up at The Village Church here." Then there was always the awkward kind of, "Oh. All right. All right, man. I'm going to get a drink. You take care, brother." Right?

I mean, this is what happens. Look. Can we be honest? We want people to like us, don't we? If you're like, "I don't care if people like me," then people don't like you! Don't worry, bro. We don't! Nobody wants to be marginalized. Nobody wants to be viewed as being a moron or some sort of hyper-spiritual goofball. We've seen some of those clowns on the news. We don't want to be that. I don't want to be the guy who is always breaking out the oil to put on people when they have a cough. "Oh, my allergies." "Praise God. Come here. All right."

We don't want to do that. There's a draw to want to have people like us. There's nothing intrinsically wrong about that desire unless it makes you sell out, unless it makes you not stand on the promises of God's Word and the teaching of Jesus Christ and, instead, has you trying to give Jesus a makeover, trying to make him more palatable to those who can't swallow him. The Bible has much to say about this. Let me read just two verses.

Proverbs 29, verse 25, says, "**The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.**" I love this. The fear of man, the desire to please man, to be accepted by man, for them to applaud us, for them to like us...it's a trap. It's a trap! It doesn't work. The desire of, "I want to be liked; I want to be accepted" actually makes you a slave to their approval of you. Now *they're* living your life rather than *you* living your life, and you've lost your spine. Ultimately, it doesn't matter. I'll say something harsh with a cute analogy.

To be terrified of a kitten and have no fear of a lion makes you a fool. For you to be mortified at a kitten ("Oh, please don't kill me!") and for you to walk up and slap a lion in the face makes you a fool, doesn't it? When your coworkers, your neighbors, those who sit around you at your children's games, when their love for you, acceptance of you, becomes more important than you pleasing God, that desire to be liked (which there is nothing wrong with that) has now gone beyond that natural desire and has revealed who your god really is.

Then this one is just heartbreaking. John 12:42-43 says, **"Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him [Jesus], but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God."** They believed in Jesus but didn't want to make it publicly known they believed in Jesus because there might be some social consequences for that.

"We might not get invited out." Right? There are social consequences at times for conviction, aren't there? There are, and all the more in these days where we're being painted as those who are intolerant, those who hate, those who are bigots. All the more in that environment will the draw be to soften what we believe, to not be vocal about what we believe, to privatize faith. Isn't that the big argument? "I don't care what you believe. If that works for you, just believe it," as though there is not a belief that hangs over everything.

"Sure, if you want to believe that, just keep it to yourself and believe that." I mean, isn't that the kind of steady pressure of our day? "Hey, if that works for you, praise God. But I don't want you talking to me about it." What we see in the beginning and what has always been true is, although there are those who will praise God for the offer of the pardon and the grace of Jesus Christ, there will be those who are offended by it. We will feel the pull of wanting to, at times, disassociate ourselves from Jesus or his people in order to try to look cool.

You should be embarrassed you're still living by junior high ethics. "Gosh! I just really want to go to the skating rink with these people. I mean, I don't know what I'm going to do on Friday night if I don't get invited to the skating rink with this crowd." I mean, I've been there. I've actually seen it with really sad eyes.

I was at this situation where I went up to... We were at a W hotel. I went down to get a drink, and I just thought, "Gosh. I'm back in high school." I mean, it was just high school in there all over again.

It's just cool kids hanging out at the wall. People who want to be with the cool kids (except we're all 40, 50, and I think that dude is 60). Hear me, please. It's just a sad way to live your life.

The question I want us to answer briefly is how is the church then to operate in a culture that is increasingly hostile to what she believes and embraces? Okay, well, in this situation, we'll watch the church begin to respond. Look at verse 29. They've been threatened and released. Now they're back with the rest of the disciples. They begin to pray.

The rest of the disciples... I don't know how many are there when this prayer is actually going on, but what we know to this point is there are least (low estimate) 8,000-10,000 people at the church in Jerusalem. That's what we know. We had 3,000 at Pentecost, 5,000 here in Acts, chapter 4. But both of those just said *men*.

We don't know how many women are actually involved in this at this point, but we know they're there. Really a more legitimate estimation is probably 12,000-20,000 people who are a part of the First Baptist Church of Jerusalem. Okay, it wasn't really a "FBC," but it was the first church in Jerusalem. From there, let's pick it up in verse 29. This is their prayer after being threatened.

"And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.' 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."

Here's a quick thing for free (off topic). Notice they just got filled with the Holy Spirit again. Didn't they already get filled with the Holy Spirit in Acts, chapter 2? Do you see what I meant when I said ultimately there's not this kind of second baptism that kind of is a varsity level of Christianity? There is an increase in the power of the Spirit that kind of flows in and flows out at different times, but the Holy Spirit is always inside of us.

This is another one of those moments where it increases, and their boldness and gladness of heart increases as the Holy Spirit fills them and turns up the volume. Here's what I want to point out about this text. They did two things. They prayed for boldness, and then they walked in it. Here's the default posture usually of churches that die. There's a ton of history to back this up. What ends

up happening when you're in an environment in which the claims of Christ and the Word of God become offensive to the predominant culture?

The idea is, "Let's soften the stances of the Bible in order to win people to Jesus. Because really Jesus is what it's all about. I mean, it's not about this sexuality conversation or this marriage conversation or *this* or *that*. It's really just about Jesus. Let's forget about all of that. In fact, let's twist and tinker that to make it more palatable to predominant culture, and let's just focus on Jesus."

Every time what ends up being discovered is that it's not just those issues that are offensive; it's Jesus himself. What goes out the window next is the atoning work of Jesus Christ. It's simply replaced with doing good to people. People get together at churches, and they go, "Let's feed the poor. Let's engage those who are hungry. Let's do good deeds, and let's help alleviate the suffering of this world."

Yes and *amen*, but to neglect people's greatest need, to simply engage their felt needs, does nothing in the long term to change their hearts, their situation, or the world around them. See, what the gospel offers when it shows up and says, "You're broken. You don't belong on that seat. Somebody else belongs on that seat" is a transformed life, a changed worldview, not just here. Your situations have changed, but you have changed.

Therefore, since you have changed, you will live in a way now walked by with the church, encouraged by the people of God in a situation that really changes the other components around your life. If the atonement is punted and if we bring a hermeneutic (or how we view the Bible) of "We don't want to make a big deal out of these positions," we remove the lamp unto our feet, the light unto our path, that leads us to human flourishing.

To back away from the teachings of Scripture around issues that our culture finds offensive is to wave the white flag on human flourishing. It is to say, "Our creator God does not know what is best for his creation. Creation knows what's best, not the Creator." That's madness.

But you're seeing all over the place under the banner of Jesus Christ those who say, "That's not what the Bible really means. I mean, I know it's been interpreted that way for thousands of years, but, man, obviously God didn't see this day coming. I mean, because if he knew where we would be today, he would see how oppressive and cruel these commands are."

See, Jesus doesn't need some Botox shots in his face. He doesn't need a makeover. He doesn't need you to make him look good. He *is* good, and he is good when he engages a man or a woman, when he engages a person, and says, "This is sinful. It's not what I have for you. This is what I have for you." That's not cruel. That's gracious. What would be cruel is if God went, "Do you know what? You're right. That's what you desire. Go."

Quick test. How many of you desire things that you know would not be good for your family, not be good for you, not be good for anyone? Go ahead. All right. Look around. Keep them up. There's nobody who doesn't. Everyone in this room has desires that, if we would give ourselves over to that desire, it would wreck shop on our family.

It would destroy kind of the love, safety, and kind of place of flourishing in our homes. It might make us lose our job. It could just shipwreck all kinds of things. It's madness to think God would go, "Do you know what, though? You really want that. Who am I to say you shouldn't have that?" We are to be bold yet gracious people.

We do believe this is what the Bible teaches about sexuality. We do believe this is what the Bible teaches about marriage. Are they primary? No. Are they important? Ferociously important. We just don't waver. We're not cruel. We're not overbearing. We understand that around all the teachings of the Word of God, there are real people affected. They're not projects. They're real people who struggle, who hurt, who feel like we would judge them.

In fact, I know there have to be those of you in this room even now who feel so uncomfortable here just thinking you wouldn't be accepted or you would be judged or we wouldn't understand your struggle. Well, I'll tell you, obviously you weren't here last weekend to hear our stories and our testimonies. Heroin addicts and victims of rape and adultery and swinging and stripping. You obviously weren't here to hear our stories. You're safe, friend. The offer of the pardon is on the table. We are to be bold yet gracious, longsuffering, and loving.

Then this is the last piece. Not only are we to pray for boldness and be bold, but we're also to live countercultural lives. Verse 32: "**Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.**" The people of God, the church of Jesus Christ, are a people (not just a person, but a people) marked by generosity.

We're generous with our money, but we're also very generous with our time. See, the church of Jesus Christ should be a place where the most difficult of people find hope, find grace, and find those willing to walk with them for the long haul. There are people who struggle with depression who will get their meds dialed in but will continue to struggle until they get a new body. The church walks alongside of them.

We don't give them silver bullets. We walk alongside. We encourage. We walk with. We rally them on. We love, serve, encourage to the end. It's not we're going to give you a couple of weeks where we try to encourage you, and if you're not better, then we're going to go to an easier person to disciple and pour into. No! The mentally ill should find a place of refuge among the people of God.

"That's dangerous, Matt." Yeah, life can be. Life can be. Aren't they the most marginalized? Why would we not, as the people of God, say, "You have a home. We're going to walk alongside. We're going to encourage you. We're going to help you as best as we can for as long as we have on earth. We're going to be here for you. We are a generous people." That's countercultural.

Then from there, **"And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all."** Not only are we generous people, but we're also storytellers. We are testifiers so that what makes us countercultural is, when you praise us, we have a tendency to tell you how God was involved in that mix. That's countercultural. We understand we're not awesome, and all that has gone right in our lives is born of God.

All that has gone wrong in our lives, we have been borne up underneath it by God so, when people approach us and go, "Man, tell us about that," our lips testify to the goodness of God. We're storytellers. You want to talk about my marriage? I have to talk about what God has done in that thing. It started out with seven awful years and has led to eight awesome years. I'm going to tell you about the seven awful years, and I'm going to tell you about how God worked in that awfulness and then has created something really beautiful.

You want to talk to me about cancer? I have to talk to you about God. You want to talk to me about raising children? I have to talk to you about my deep need for Jesus and my lack of patience. You want to talk to me about trying to live responsibly with finances? I have to talk to you about the generosity of my God toward me. How could I not be generous when so much generosity has been

lavished upon me? See, we're storytellers. We have one thing to praise, and it's not us. That's countercultural. We don't ever beat our chests. We have nothing to beat our chests about.

If we continue to read this, they're ferociously committed to one another. They're sharing. They're selling their stuff to give to those in need. There is a gladness to submit to authority. You want to talk about countercultural? They talk about the idea of submitting to authority, because when they sell their stuff, they don't divvy it up. They give it to the apostles to divvy up. They trust an authority put in place by God.

Don't get nervous. I'm not taking an offering. This is how we're countercultural. We're ferocious about our marriages. They're going to be hard (some of them). On a scale of 1 to 10, some marriages, at their best, are a 4. But we lean into the covenant. We lean into the promise. We lean into what God is displaying in our marriage. We don't punt easily. We're going to be betrayed. We're going to feel like somebody else would make a better spouse.

It's going to happen, and we're going to lean into the covenant. We're going to lean into our spouse. We're going to model well covenant-keeping love. We're going to be generous people. We're going to love our kids but not love them in such a way that they think they're God. We're going to train them in righteousness. We're countercultural people. We're going to fight against our sin ferociously.

We're going to walk in boldness and gladness, generosity, in glad submission to authority, telling the story of God's goodness and grace on our lives. This is how you operate in a hostile environment. You're unmoved, rooted into the Word of God. This is what the Bible says. I'm going to trust God knows more than me. I'm going to trust God knows more than this day and age.

We're running out of time, but hear me. There are things everyone believed 50 years ago that we look at today as being so ridiculous that even if I were to talk with my grandparents, they're embarrassed they once believed it. You don't think that's happening right now? You don't think 50 years from now that won't be happening then? You don't think 200 years from then that won't be happening then?

There is no apex of human existence. It is always sinful. It is always fallen until it is redeemed fully at the return of Christ. We will always think we're smarter than God. The Word of God is what roots us. The Word of God is what binds us. The Word of God is what is the lamp unto our feet and the

light unto our path. Be bold, brother and sister. Be gracious, be loving, but be bold. We have been pulled out of the muck and the mire, and our feet have been set on the rock. Let's pray.

Father, help us. Many of us, Father, just have weak legs, weak spines. We're fearful, and we're not even sure why. I pray, Holy Spirit, that you would grant us boldness, wisdom, that you would create in our hearts a ferocity to make much of you. Whatever it is in us that seeks to please men over pleasing you, I pray you would wring it out, root it out, pull it out, destroy it fully.

Help us to have the same heart that was in the apostle Paul when he said, "If I'm a fool, I'm a fool for Christ." I thank you that there is coming a day where we won't feel foolish at all. In the meantime, strengthen our resolve. Grant us wisdom. It's for your beautiful name, amen.

Love you guys.