

Acts Chapter 4

There are two sections in this chapter

1. The Gospel and the clash of values (Acts 4:1-13)
2. The Gospel and authentic faith (Acts 4: 14 – 37)

1. THE GOSPEL AND THE CLASH OF VALUES

How the gospel interacted with the culture at that time? That would give us some idea of how the gospel interacts with our culture in our time.

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. 4 But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand (Acts 4:1-4 ESV)

Jerusalem at that time had a population of about 40,000 people. Now three thousand earlier and these five thousand makes it eight thousand, which is a significant proportion of the city suddenly became non-Jews and that is a huge threat to the authorities at that particular time and now they have got this miracle of a man gotten healed at the beautiful gate. Everybody knew him; he was like 40 years of age. He was born with weak legs and suddenly he is healed and they cannot run from that. This is now the first time Peter have been captured,

On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, 6 with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this (Acts 4:5-7 ESV)

These are the people who crucified Jesus.

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, 9 if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. 11 This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:8-12 ESV)

This is huge because he now says I healed this man by the name of Jesus whom you killed and God raise from the dead. If they can produce Jesus’s body that would be the simplest solution to Peter’s claim but cannot do that because this is proof that Jesus rose from the dead.

12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved

This is the truth claim of the gospel. Now if you were a Jew at that time, Judaism is not a problem because they have a private Messiah. He is a Messiah for the people who are Jews. They think that he is going to come to restore the kingdom of Israel, so you are not going to upset anybody. If you are a Roman, the Roman religion says yes you can worship your own gods but you must also acknowledge Caesar as Lord. So you take Jesus as Lord, your messiah on top of that Caesar is also Lord. So everybody got along. Then you come to this new religion, Christianity, Jesus is Lord and there is no other name under heaven by which people are to be saved. All others are not worthy of this. There is Jesus now whom Peter claims to be the only one and that came a significant problem and the conflict started.

Problem with truth claims

When your truth claim hit society, how the society reacts. We have got problem with truth claims today. When you start to put your truth claim on the rest of population then you have got big problem.

What about Christianity?

The crusaders use to go across to capture cities in the Middle East and to subjugate people, there truth claim was that Jesus is Lord and so we fight for him. They tried to imperialistically impose their truth claim on everybody else. The Western world is very upset and fed up of truth claims. The Eastern world is not so bad and therefore they are saying, we should move towards to the situation where there is no room for exclusivistic claims and this can also come to our country also. We rather have non-truth, need to adapt and say all religions equally valid.

You can believe in Jesus but don't say the rest are not valid must accept he is same with others. In the West they are doing that because you see all this trouble in the East when you got Hudud against Christianity and all sort of things.

SOLUTION BY WORLD:

You accept Jesus but don't say the rest is not valid, you must accept and you say he is the same like everybody else, but Jesus won't do that. If we look at Jesus truth claims

- Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6 ESV)
- No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known (John 1:18 ESV)
- I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever (John 6:51 ESV)

You cannot run from Jesus Christ. He has exclusive truth claims. No other religion will say this. For Islam they will say, you pray five times a day, you do good things, you worship god, he gives you a set of recipes for which if god likes you then you get saved. Buddhism follow the eightfold path and they you will reach Nirvana. There is no faith in the world that will say, I will get rid of your sin. Buddha never said that, Mohammad never said that, only Jesus Christ said that.

Toyohiko Kagawa was a very famous Christian. He started schools and changed much of Japanese society at that time and this is what he wrote about converting to Christianity.

*I am grateful for Shinto, for Buddhism and for Confucianism, I owe much to these faiths but yet they could not meet me at the heart of my deepest needs. I was a pilgrim journeying through a long road that had no turning, I was weary, I was foot sore . I wandered through a dark and dismal world where tragedies were thick. Buddhism teaches great compassion but since the beginning of time who has said **for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins***

We can learn all sort of theories on how to get to God but there is no other person who says when I come down this is my body broken for you, you accept me, my blood and I will save you. There is no person in the history of mankind that actually had done that.

Either Jesus right or He is wrong but he is not the same as everyone else. You cannot just say, all religions lead to God and all the leaders of the religions are all the same. He is either right or he is crazy.

Jesus; Lord, Liar or Lunatic

The evidence is his character in his life, his teaching and also his resurrection. The most important thing is his resurrection. So Westerners are now saying that we have got all sorts of religion and to have peace in the world you must have modern pluralism which means we accept all religions. So if you are Buddhist good for you, you are Hindu good for you, you are a Christian good for you, you are a Baha'i good for you, we are all the same. You mustn't say any religion is the truth but the problem is if all religions are equally valid you only got two conclusions.

- Either God is not really there.
- God is not interested.

You must impose your value on other people, which means you cannot stick to any particular religion. You must say all is accepted and then what happens that Modern Pluralism becomes another religion because it makes exclusive claims. It says, *you cannot accept any religion, you must have all religions*. That itself is an exclusivistic truth claim that which then impinges on the right of everybody else. So it becomes a religion on its own.

What are the implications if you say all religions are equally valid?

So you have a problem.

1. You got moral feelings. I think slapping this other guy is good. You say slapping the guy is bad, I got moral feelings. Moral feelings you can actually keep to yourself.
2. Moral obligations. That is when we clash. For example you can go to India in those days and in those days they have this funny custom when the husband dies the wife also has to jump into the fire. This custom was called Suttee. So the Westerners came and they said this is morally wrong, you cannot jump into the fire. So they were actually imposing not their moral feelings but their moral obligations on them. What right do they have to do that?

If we go all over the world, you find that in the Muslim countries the women are not able to study or read. You say that is bad but how can you say that is bad? What makes it good? Can you test in scientific theory what is good and bad? When you come to moral values it is actually beyond science. You go to China in those days and they use to wrap up girls legs and it became very small and when they have the mincing steps it looks so sexy to them and the man loved that in those days. The Westerners impose their value, you are ruining peoples, young girls feet. So they impose their values.

What about people who wear silicon breast. They think it is good but small feet is bad. So you actually have a clash of values if you are all going to say you not only have moral values but must have moral obligations. That is when all the religions come into trouble. So it is actually culture wars which we are now experiencing all over the world because you got globalization. Globalization brings all the kinds of religions together, all sorts of cultures together and there is a clash. So if you say all religions are accepted then what is the solution? Keller puts up this idea, the Christian alternative that we must have non oppressive moral absolutes which is a very difficult concept to understand and he takes it from this particular passage

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, 9 if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. 11 This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:8-12 ESV)

So how should Christians act in the world? Should we impose our values on people or not and basically he is saying what Christian should do is Christian should serve like their savior which was rejected by the Pharisees

Jesus saved us through rejection...by leaders...corner stone...not by coming with power like a general but through service, homelessness, not by accruing power but giving up power.

That is how he served. So if Christians are in the world today we have non oppressive moral values. It means in society we don't impose values but we actually serve.

Nicolaus Ludwig Zinzendorf was a Moravian Prince and he encountered a painting in Dusseldorf one day looking at Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ suffering and the words are "*All this I have done for you; what have you done for me?*" and that immediately really struck him in the heart, he went on his knees and dedicated his life to Jesus Christ and he started the Moravian missions which was all over the world and what they did was they went to the most difficult places. Two guys; Johann Leonhard Dober and David Nitschmann went to British Virgin Islands, St. Thomas and St. Croix. They left their families behind and went to this place which thousands of slaves. They cannot go there unless they are a slave. So therefore they were willing to sell themselves into a lifelong servitude, but actually there was a law that white people cannot be slaved. So they actually worked there as carpenters. The story has been distorted over the year. They did not sell themselves to lifelong slavery, they actually went back to Germany years later on and served as elders in the Brethren Church but they gave up everything and they served. Last count when they left more than 13000 slaves have already come to know Christ and were baptized. That is how Christians serve society, not imposing their values but serving the people.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished (Acts 4:13 ESV)

Why were they astonished?

If we look at older societies there is a hierarchal pecking order; the headmaster at the top and the students hardly alive. It is a lower form of existence. So everything is in a pecking order. Here we actually see Peter and John who are low class fisherman. They are considered as nobody. When they stood in the presence of high priests and rulers there worth was nothing, at a single word they could be killed. But Peter and John were absolutely bold.

How do they get there boldness?

In the pecking order in the world today there is always someone above you and someone else below you. You think you are fantastic violin player in your village then you go to a city and the guy at the side of the road basking is even better than you. How would you feel? So in the world today, if you build your self-esteem on this pecking order it does not last because there is always someone better than you and someone worse than you.

Peter and John have their self-esteem based on grace. They were not shy. They have new self-esteem. Their new self-esteem is based on the grace of Jesus Christ. They do not feel superior to other people, as they are also sinners but do not feel less than other people because they are sons of God. So therefore they move themselves away from this pecking order into a new order where the king of the universe has given his life for them and therein lies the new self-esteem and therein lies their boldness, common people can stand and that applies to us as Christians, we too can stand before kings and prime ministers and have that kind of boldness and confidence because Jesus Christ gave his life to die for us and that is the

basis of our self-confidence. So the world needs people whose truth makes them humble servants and the reason why the truth makes them humble servants is because their self-esteem is based on grace. If your self-esteem is based on grace you can be humble. When you come down to the lowest person and wash his dirty feet it does not make you worse, you know why, because your self-esteem is being the child of the only High King in the world. So that is the only truth claim that makes us humble servants. So it does not matter who you are, you have got new identity.

So Paul says

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:1-2 ESV)

So therefore we must move our self-esteem to the things that we are most proud of and the proudest thing in our life is that Jesus Christ died for me and that grips the centre of your heart and your personality, nothing else matters. So when Paul goes anywhere the only thing he wants to know is that Christ and Christ crucified.

And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:3-5 ESV)

Non oppressive moral absolutes?

Let me give you an example, is this a viable thought?

Angela Merkel, Christian woman, chancellor of Germany recently had one million Syrian refugees poured into the country and she opened the doors and they came in and now she is going to get unelected. Why did she do that? At the core of being she has Christian values, which means human beings are valuable whether they are Syrian or African or Malaysian and she did that because of a core belief. It was a politically suicidal kind of thing to do, but she actually applied Christian moral principles and absolutes into her work life. You cannot say the moral absolutes that I have does not influence your life, even if you live in the multicultural society.

Even if all people are equal we live in a pluralistic society but we will still have clash of values. The problem we have in the world today is that multiculturalism has no standards. A woman says I want to abort the baby, it is my baby, my body, I will do what I want, people want same sex marriages, some want to get married to more than one wives, but the same for others is not allowed according to their values that they have even in this multicultural society. The problem is if you live in a world where you say there is no real absolute true claim, everybody could have fall back to their faith. There is no such thing as multiculturalism.

Can we actually have non oppressive moral absolutes?

Can we actually have them in the world? In some countries hunting somebody down and cutting their heads is actually a good thing. Fighting was a sports where one man kill the other man, it used to be norm in Europe and then the Christian went to stop it. So the solution is that we are the salt of the earth, whatever they tell you under multiculturalism you have to impose your Christian values. If you are Buddhist you impose your value because there is no society where you values don't get involved. Our values are involved in every single part of culture. All the things that we have said are actually used based on Judeo-Christian values. The fact that you cannot have gay marriage, you cannot have polygamy, you cannot have incest, all those are actually Judeo-Christian values, which are basically the default mode in the world because of the influence of Christ.

We have Magna Carta (British Law) for the first time in the world they forced King John to allow every single man a fair trial. Before that people don't have fair trail and then the king for the first time was under the law. These are all Judeo-Christian values.

We have United Nation declaration of human rights affected by Judeo-Christian values. So here you actually see that when the gospel impinges a society there is no such thing as you don't impinge your values. Your moral feelings and your moral absolutes do affect how you actually run the country. It is a fact because otherwise people will ask you, why cannot you marry your cow or your pet dog. You cannot answer the question. The only way you say is I have a faith and my faith says that is not right.

2. THE FEATURES OF AUTHENTIC FAITH

How do you know that your faith is real?

Here we have persecution

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. 14 But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. 15 But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, 16 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. 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 (Acts 4:13-17 ESV)

1. Authentic faith preservers

So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 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, 20 for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." 21 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. 22 For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than forty years old (Acts 4:18-22 ESV)

Real miracle backs up the truth claims and they were persecuted, they were locked up but they were threatened but authentic faith perseveres, it does not step down, no matter what the law says.

And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, (Acts 4:29)

When they are threatened what did the Christians do. They did not pray for their own security but they pray for boldness to continue to witness.

Authentic faith upholds God's glory as number 1, not your personal needs. We are now entering a phase in Christianity in our country and many parts of the world where this prosperity gospel has shifted the focus away from God and towards us. So therefore God become somebody who does things for us. Many of our churches are crowded when you have a healing rally and empty when you have gospel rally. Why, because they are in it for us.

If we look at Job, described as a rich man and then God allowed Satan to take away things.

And the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" 9 Then Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason (Job 1:8-9 ESV)

Satan said that you made him rich that is why he fears you, take away everything from him and you will see how much he loves you. Many Christians, all of us included, may love God or stand in the church simply because we are okay. Job's wife said

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die." (Job 2:9 ESV)

Curse God and die is the first thing that happens for Christians who don't really know God, the inauthentic faith. You are doing well then suddenly things went bad. When things went bad, they question why God cursed me. Because if God is in charge of everything, so his job is to make sure nothing bad happens to me. If it happens to me, it means God is in control right, he did it, curse him and die that is an authentic faith.

Authentic faith perseveres.

10 But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips (Job 2:9-10 ESV)

2. Authentic faith turns to God deliberately.

When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, 25 who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:23-25 ESV)

So therefore the first thing they did was to turn to God deliberately. Imagine you see a counselor and you tell them your problems. Then you say, can you baby sit my son tonight I am looking to buy a new house. Is there something wrong with this conversation?

Sometimes it is like the way we treat God. You pray and God has poured out His heart and sent His Son to the cross to save us And the first thing you do is YOU SAY Bless my job and my wife. I need to improve my investments. My leg hurts...I need to lose some weight.

He is God of all the universe, he has done this, he has poured himself out and all that for you and just smothered you and you walk in and you put your list. That is not prayer. The way the apostles pray, Sovereign Lord and they start praising God. Real prayer is responding. Eugene Peterson says, *prayer is responding to God*. So whenever you got into pray especially in times of danger you respond to God by responding to what he has done.

“Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,

They have anxiety and fear but they quote scripture.

““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’ — (Acts 4:25-26 ESV)

This is actually taken from Psalm 2.

He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. 5 Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 6 “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill (Psalms 2:4-6 ESV)

Here we actually have the apostles being beaten and being warn not to share the gospel and they turn to Psalm 2 and the Psalm 2 describes the situation where all the rulers plot against the Messiah. God laughs and speak to them in his fury,

6 “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill 7 I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel (Psalms 2:7-9 ESV)

Imagine you are in a airplane flying out of JFK in New York suddenly a flock of birds hit you and suddenly the plane going down and this is hardly like few seconds after you took off and you are watching the ground come closer and closer and you are wobbling and you know you

are going to die. You could stand there and start screaming or what if you went to the cockpit and you saw the best pilot in the world flying that plane. Seeing him you will know it is going to be okay and so what are they doing. They are actually talking to God about who He really is and in the process they heal their hearts. God heal their hearts by telling them who he is. So if your heart is anxious and worried and clouded, there is no point re-amplifying that and focus on whether I got enough money, whether I am clever enough, whether I am strong enough to get out of this, what are the 15 ways to get out of this, instead of focus on who He is. By focusing on who He is and talking to him of who He is they actually heal their hearts and there is a secret to persecution, secret to the pain in your life. Focus on who He is, worship.

3. Authentic faith reinterprets events from God's point of view

for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place (Acts 4:27-28 ESV)

The most massive injustice, the most cruelest event in the world, the worst disaster actually became God's best plan. So you actually look at whatever happens and reinterpret in your life of what God is going to do.

In chapter 10 of Daniel he prayed and the people of God returned to Jerusalem but life was bad there. They couldn't rebuild Jerusalem, it is all falling apart and he is wondering why he is praying and fasting for three weeks and nothing is happening and then the angel comes to him and tells him that God heard him from the first day you started praying. The angel was fighting a battle with the devil that is why he was delayed but he still got there. So one need to look back and reinterpret historical events in cosmic reality and that is what the apostle was able to do. They know that Jesus's death, the most greatest injustice and evil in the world had a plan. So therefore the current problem also must have plan. This is not exactly the greatest injustice in the world. Surely God is behind it as well.

4. Authentic faith experiences God periodically

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 (Acts 4:31 ESV)

So there is a periodic period of time. We see the early disciples when they really pray under great pressure God warms their heart, gives them a real feeling of His presence. So it makes it real. The Holy Spirit is the one

He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 16:14-15 ESV)

So he makes Jesus beautiful to you. So we don't suppose to live on emotions, we live on the truth but off and on in difficult times when we pray God shakes the place and shakes your heart.

5. Authentic faith exhibits God generously

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. 33 And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold 35 and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. 36 Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, 37 sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:32-37 ESV)

This is another sign of authentic faith. A lot of people talk and say a lot of things but you know the most important hand that moves is the one that signs the checkbook. We see here for the first time in living history there, people take all their money and share and we are talking about starting to take their pension. They take all their pension, all their houses that they actually have and sell them so they have nothing. That tells us something is happening, the authentic faith moves so that they began to depend on God and God alone.

If you have a faith and it never moves your hand that writes the check then there is something wrong with you. So these are all signs of authentic faith.

Tim Keller put it as *The place is shaken but they become unshakable*

God shakes the whole place but the people of God become unshakeable, they go out and despite everything they continue to share the gospel and we want to pray that all of us Christians in this country, no matter what laws they are going to pass that our faith would be unshakeable, our resolve unmovable and our mission achievable by the Holy Spirit.