**Real Church: Foundations**

**Acts 17:1-9 (ESV)**

June 2, 2019

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***1*** *Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Appolonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.* ***2*** *And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures,* ***3*** *explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.”* ***4*** *And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.* ***5*** *But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.* ***6*** *And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also,* ***7*** *and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.”* ***8*** *And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things.* ***9*** *And when they had taken money as security from Jason and the rest, they let them go.*

Today we begin a series entitled *Real Church*. I think believers both young and old long for the church to be real, to be genuine, authentic, to be something that is not fake, not superficial, not phony. They long for the church to be a true family that doesn’t just put on a show, put on a smiling face, doesn’t hide behind painful emotions and difficulties. They long for the church to be real in its genuine love for God not only in lip service, but in its heart for the Lord and its genuine love for each other. They long for a church that is real in its consistency. What it says is how it lives. They long for a church that is honest about sin; sin in our own hearts and sin in our own family. It’s authentic in its repentance before the Lord and before one another. Real Church is a powerful instrument in God’s hands.

So at the beginning of this series, I ask that you would pray. Pray for churches everywhere, but specifically if you are a part of this church, pray for this church. If you are part of another church, pray for the church that you are in. Pray, pray, pray for us to grow together as a real church. We pray this because few matters are more important to our connection with God, our worship of Him, our ability to glorify Him, than our healthy relationship to Jesus’ church. In fact, I would make this statement: No follower of Jesus can be healthy in his or her own personal walk with God without being healthy in his or her connection to the local church. I believe that’s just the clear teaching of the New Testament. We’re going to be studying that.

I stated this truth once before and someone protested, “What if you live in a place where it’s illegal to be a Christian and perhaps you are even imprisoned because of your faith in Jesus? Are you saying that that persecuted Christian is not healthy in his or her personal walk with Christ?” And I would say, of course not. That’s not what I’m saying. If external forces like persecution create a physical separation from the local church, ahealthy relationship with the local church will look very different.But it’s still possible even in that situation to have a healthy relationship with God’s local church. Let me use a human illustration.

There are a number of men from our church who are deployed in foreign places right now with our nation’s military. We think of Derek Uhler and Dan Wilton, Nathaniel Ommen, and my own son, Danny Boerckel. A healthy connection to their marriage during their deployment, a time of separation, is different than a healthy connection to their marriage when they are at home. Right now, they are physically separated from their wives, but that doesn’t mean they can’t have a healthy relationship with their wife. Now when they return home, if they continue to live as though they are separated, as though they are deployed, we’d say something is terribly wrong.

The local church is God’s idea. It is God’s creation. It is God’s work.God Himself designs His church. He builds the church. He owns the church. He is the architect, builder and proprietor, title holder of the church. Jesus, before the church even began, said, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18).

The church is not founded like other organizations such as the Rotary Club, Kiwanis, Boy Scouts, Bible Study Fellowship. These organizations were begun when a person saw a need and decided to organize others to address a need. But this is not the church. Peter didn’t gather disciples together after Jesus’ death and resurrection and say, “Hey, do you know what would be great? We need to meet together for community, for worship and for mission. We should start an organization. Let’s call it the church, the assembly. And let’s try and encourage others to build this thing.” No, Peter and the other disciples… What happened? They were just simply given instructions by God to get together in a little room and pray and wait. They were told to wait for the Holy Spirit to come and to begin the church.

When the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, God sovereignly added 3,000 souls to the newly instituted church. From that point on, the record of Acts is one of the Holy Spirit’s work in planting churches and growing churches for the glory of Jesus Christ. So the church did not begin and it did not continue to grow as a result of human effort. It began and grew as a result of the sovereign working of God by His Holy Spirit, in the disciples of Jesus.

So again, a huge principle for us to wrap our arms around is that this is something different from any other society, any other organization. This thing called the local church is a thing, an organization, a society, a family that God Himself designs, builds and owns. If we can wrap our arms around that truth, our relationship with the church of Jesus Christ will change. There will be some life-altering applications we will make in reference to the local church. What are some of those applications?

1. We will love the local church to the point of giving our lives for her.

We recognize that this is what Jesus did. And aren’t we, as followers of Jesus, to be like Jesus? Jesus gave up Himself for her, for the local church.To be like Jesus means that we commit our very own lives to the advance of the health and mission of Jesus’ church, so that we see the church’s mission as our own mission.

2. We believe that Jesus’ church is the most honorable and valued association in our lives.

There’s nothing like it! Not even our physical families, as precious as physical families are. This association we have with Jesus’ church is even more sacred, more eternal, more lasting. So we don’t consider our connection, our commitment, our part in the local church as some sort of obligation. “Well, I guess we should do this. God told us to do it, so we should.” We don’t see it as some kind of commitment that is external. But we see our connection to the local church as something that is part of who we are. It is a life-giving joy of a gift received from God to be part of this thing called Jesus’ church.

3. We will endure with the local church despite her many problems and failings.

Does the local church have problems? Does the local church have failings? Yes, indeed. We’re all part of it and we are weak and flawed people. But we will not give up on her when we recognize that God designs, God builds, God owns this thing called the church. We will see her failings as “us” problems and not “they” problems. Have you ever talked about the failings or problems in your own local church as “they”? You know, “They need to do that. I wish they would be more like this. I wish they…” No, if we understand that God owns, builds, and designs His own church, we’re going to say, “we.” I’m part of this. We will rejoice that God would use us to strengthen her. So we will be free of an outsider’s contempt and instead, be filled with an insider’s ownership.

4. We will deeply love other people in the church.

We will care for other members of the church as brothers and sisters, as members of the very same family. We will see the church not as a place to go to on a Sunday morning, but as a people to belong to, as a family to enjoy. In joy, Jesus declared, “I will build my church!” How fun to be part of that! The eternal Son of God has a project that He is continuing in this world, and we get to be part of that! Jesus delighted to build His church in the 1st century. We’re going to be reading about that in Acts 17. And He delights to build His church in the 21st century. And this mission, this building project is going to continue all the way until Jesus returns.

How is it that God creates and builds His Church?What is His method? We are going to look at the birth of this church in Thessalonica to answer that question at least in part. As we turn to Acts 17, we discover four foundation stones of every church. Now, these aren’t the only foundation stones, but they’re the ones that are presented prominently here in Acts 17. These foundation stones are always present in every church, in every culture, in every age. There are certain aspects about the church that are different from culture to culture, from historical period to historical period. But there are some things that are exactly the same. What we experience here in the 21st century in the United States is the same thing that people in Thessalonica experienced in the 1st century. We want to observe those things to see what is the heart of God, related to His priorities. So we pick up the story in verse 1.

***1*** *Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Appolonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.*

It’s easy to slide right past verse 1 to get into the meat of the story, but it’s important for us to remember what just happened to the Apostle Paul and his team of church planters. They are traveling from the city of Philippi where God directed them to plant their first church in what is now known as Europe. So God directed this team to plant their first church in what is now known as Europe, in the city of Philippi. And in that city, if you turn back to Acts 16:22-24, you see that they experienced great persecution. They suffered greatly! There was a crowd that had joined in attacking Paul and Silas in particular because they liberated this demon-possessed girl of the demons.

**Acts 16:22** The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them

Think of that!

**Acts 16:22-23** and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them,

There’s not great description here, but it’s enough description to know this is horrible. It’s a horrible thing to have your clothes torn right off of you in a public place and then to be ordered by civil authorities to have soldiers beat you mercilessly and have them inflict many blows upon you. And then afterwards

**Acts 16:23** they threw them into prison,

This is not a prison like we have in the United States. It’s a horrible stench-filled, terrible place. It’s dark.

**Acts 16:23-24** ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

They are in the worst part of the prison. God of course, in the story, liberates them. And finally, in verse 40, once they are out

**Acts 16:40** So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia.

She was the first convert in Phillipi.

**Acts 16:40** And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.

Now they have a family there that had already begun in this short amount of time in Philippi. It’s interesting that instead of saying “they received encouragement,” they’re still always giving, giving, giving. They encouraged the brothers to stay true to Christ and to hold fast to the gospel, and then they departed. And that’s where verse 1 of 17 begins.

We would expect, after hearing a story like that, that verse 1 of 17 might say something like this. “After receiving such brutal blows, emotional turmoil, difficult imprisonment, Paul, Silas, and the team took a well-deserved vacation along the coast to heal physically and emotionally.” We might expect that that’s the way chapter 17 is going to open up. Now, there is nothing wrong with taking rest in order to be restored. But they said, “This mission of ours is so urgent, we need to press on through this. We need to plant more churches. That’s what Jesus is about, so we need to go to the next city and plant churches there.”

So they walked from Philippi to Amphipolis. That’s a 30 mile walk. Think of that! How painful must every step be as they are making their way to Thessalonica! They’ve just been beaten brutally and they were put in stocks, and now they’re walking 30 miles. And then when they get to Amphipolis, they travel on to Appolonia. That’s another 30 miles. And then from Appolonia, they travel to Thessalonica. That’s another 40 miles on foot. They walked 100 miles! We’re not told how long it takes them to get to Thessalonica, but you can imagine how painful those steps must have been.

The point here is it’s never healthy to disconnect from our passionate commitment to be active in Jesus’ work of building His church. Now again, there are appropriate seasons of rest. I’m thankful that a year and a half ago, this church allowed me to take an 8 week sabbatical. But it’s for the purpose of getting restored, renewed, refreshed to re-engage in the work. Many believers, after suffering injury in ministry or in relationship with the local church, are tempted to check out of God’s plan for His church. Or if they don’t completely check out, in other words say, “I’m not going to go. I’m not going to attend. I’m not going to be part,” they come, but they only engage by sitting and listening and maybe singing on Sunday morning. There’s no more active connection. If you talk to them and ask them, “Why aren’t you involved in church?” they say, “I was hurt so bad.” I understand that. That is a great temptation that a hurting soul experiences when they’re in a church and they’re hurt by the church. But the call of Jesus Christ to follow Him and be part of this great work, this great mission, there is a path back to healthy engagement. And that’s a necessary path in order to have healthy engagement with God Himself. Here is Paul’s testimony from 1 Thessalonians chapter 2.

**1 Thessalonians 2:1-2** For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain. But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

He says, “You know this part of the story. When we got there, we still had bruises.”

What do you think motivated Paul to endure hardship and continue the work of Jesus’ church, planting churches and strengthening Jesus’ church? Paul is not a man driven by guilt or by obligation**.** And I don’t want you to leave here thinking that God intends for you to re-engage with the church from a motivation of guilt, like “I should. This is what I should do,” or in any way a sense of shame or obligation. Paul is driven by a joy in Christ. And I want to tell you brothers and sisters, that our joy in Christ is connected to our active engagement with Jesus’ church. Paul understood that eternal joy is tied to Jesus and that Jesus ties Himself to His church in this world. So the first foundation we’re going to look at is

**Foundation #1: Conviction to teach God’s Word.**

***2*** *And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures,* ***3*** *explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.”*

Paul takes the initiative to bring the gospel to those in the city of Thessalonica who did not yet believe. He knows that there are people that God is sending him to so that when they hear the gospel, they will believe. The Apostle Paul doesn’t wait for people to come up to him and ask the question, “What must I do to be saved?” That happened in Philippi, and he could have said, “Well, this is the way God always does it. I’ll just wait for someone to come up to me and ask me the question.” And oftentimes as believers, that’s where we are. We say, “I’ll be a faithful witness if you have people come up to me. Maybe they’ll see something about my life and then ask me the question ‘What must I do to be saved?’” And God sometimes does that. But when God gives us a mission, He says, “Go and make disciples.” In other words, there is movement to take initiative. And that’s what we see Paul doing.

As was his custom, he would get into a city and the first thing he would do is he would find a point of contact. His point of contact was the synagogue. Now, that’s not likely our point of contact, but it’s the Apostle Paul’s. He takes the initiative to enter into a synagogue, a synagogue that doesn’t know the gospel about Jesus, doesn’t know the good news, and he says, “I’m going to find a way in here to reason with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving and proclaiming.” The synagogues were places where the Old Testament was read, taught and discussed. And so here again was his best point of contact. I want you to think about this for a moment as we think about this conviction to share the Word. That’s a pillar of the church. That’s a pillar of our lives. It’s a pillar of our family. What is your best point of contact with the world that God has you to go and share the gospel with? What is the best point of contact? For each one of us, it’s bound to be a bit different.

Last week, you may remember thatMicaiah shared a message regarding the personal work of proclaiming the gospel to others. He had this crazily complex diagram for you to fill out. But really, it was simple. It was saying look in your family, look in your work place, look in your neighborhood, look in the sphere of hobbies or some other sphere of your activity of life, and then begin writing names. And what you’re doing there is saying, “I need to take the initiative. I can’t wait for just people to come up to me. I want to start writing names of people that are my best point of contact, and I want to go to them. I want to pray for them, that God would prepare them, and then I want to look for ways to go. I want to look for open doors to reason with them from the Scriptures. Not to reason with them from my own personal point of view, but reason with them from the Word of God about who Jesus is, what He came to do and how He is the source of life.”

Someone says, “What do I say when I bring the Scriptures to people? Do you have to be trained in Seminary in order to do this?” No. If you’re a follower of Jesus Christ, the expectation God has upon us as followers is that we would open up God’s Word and point people to Jesus. Now it helps to be trained. It helps to grow deeper in our understanding of the Word. But if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you know enough to open up the Bible and say, “Can I show you something about Jesus?” and then watch God work. And that’s what the Apostle Paul did. He reasoned with them from the Scriptures.

Now that word “reasoned” is interesting. It doesn’t mean “preached at.” There’s nothing wrong with preaching. In fact, there’s everything right with preaching, but that’s not the word that God uses here. This word is a Greek word from which we get the English word “dialogue.” So in the synagogue there appears to be some back and forth. There is some talking, some question asking, some listening, some responding to what is happening in the discussion. Effective Christian witness always listens to those we are sharing the Gospel with, having a sincere desire to understand their questions and to understand their resistance. It’s important for us not to just merely say, “Well I gave them a tract. I shared a verse with them,” and then back out of the conversation. We listen to questions. We listen to responses and we look for God to lead us to ways through the Word, to point people to Jesus.

Now again, this is really important. The church must be a place both internally as well as externally to those who are coming in from outside, where anyone can ask any question. The church is not a place that affirms every answer to every question. But it’s a place where it’s allowed and encouraged to ask those questions. We’re happy when people ask questions. And I think that’s important for us as parents as we raise our children. They may ask questions. We might say, “What are you doing? By now you should know that.” No, this is great! You’re asking a question. It’s an open door. I want to reason with you from the Scriptures. I want to dialogue. I want to know what the question is. I want to know what is behind the question. I want to understand you and your struggle. I know the Bible has an answer. That’s the confidence. And I want you to be able to ask those questions so that there is opportunity to reason.

After he uses that word “reason with them from the Scriptures,” he uses three other words, and I want you to underline these, that help us understand what reasoning with people from the Scriptures means. Do you see how he uses the word “explaining”? And then he uses the word “proving.” And finally the word “proclaimed,” in verses 2 and 3. You might underline those words.

To explain literally means “to open.” Luke uses this word in his gospel. He uses it not only just in Acts, but he uses this word in his gospel to describe the opening of the womb in Luke 2. He uses this word to describe the opening of the eyes to see Jesus on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24. So what Paul says he did in reasoning from the Scriptures is first, he opened it. So sometimes, it’s just that simple to say, “Let’s open the Bible. Let’s talk about what God says. It’s not my opinion that matters. I just want to share with you what God has said about Jesus.” That’s explaining. “Let’s open it and let me try to talk about it in terms with which you can understand, and that are clear.

And then the word proving means “giving evidence.” It means saying, “You don’t have to throw out your brain in order to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, that He died and that He rose again. In fact, there is a lot of evidence that points to the veracity of Jesus’ claims about Himself and the truthfulness of what Jesus did. Let’s talk about the reasonable proof of Jesus the Messiah.” And then the text tells us in verse 3

***3*** *explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.”*

Now we’re at that moment of we’re listening to questions. We’re opening up the Bible. We’re offering proof. And now we’re making some absolute statements about our convictions, about what we believe, what we know to be true of Jesus. And we’re saying, “Here is who this Jesus is. He died on the cross for sins. He rose bodily from the grave. He is King of kings. He is Lord of lords.” It simply is the telling of the gospel story. Dialogue is a part of witness, but there is a time to simply proclaim the truth about Jesus at some point in the conversation. This is often where it gets offensive, because our truth claims are contrary to a natural man’s beliefs. But nonetheless, we risk that. The Apostle Paul risked it, and we’re going to find here in this church story that he suffered as a result of it.

But notice as you open up God’s Word, what he focused on. It was the Person of Jesus. He didn’t open God’s Word and talk about philosophy. He didn’t open God’s Word and talk about moral ethics. He didn’t open God’s Word and talk about religious ceremony. He didn’t open God’s Word and talk about politics. He didn’t open God’s Word and talk about psychology. All of those things, I believe the Scripture addresses, and it is right as believers to be informed on all those subjects. But the church is rooted and founded on opening God’s Word and saying, “The first thing is for me to know Jesus and for me to proclaim Jesus.” That’s of first importance. That’s the pillar. It’s the foundation, the Person of Jesus. He is the first and the last. He’s the beginning and the end of everything. And by that, He is the first and the last of our message. He’s the beginning and the end of our proclamation.

The church rests upon the conviction that God’s Word is powerful and it’s necessary and we need to teach it and to open it and to explain it, and we need to proclaim it. We need to proclaim Jesus as Jesus reveals Himself through the living Word of God. So we point people to Jesus by opening the Bible. There is no Jesus we have access to apart from Scripture.

Let me read you a few verses that talk about the power of the Word’s necessity. Jesus says

**Matthew 4:4** “‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

That’s Jesus. He says this is absolutely fundamental to the church. Peter says

**1 Peter 1:23** since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

It’s the Scriptures that give us access to the life of God and His power.

**Hebrews 4:12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Without God’s Word, there is no church. The first foundation is conviction to teach God’s Word.

**Foundation #2: Conversions from the Holy Spirit**

***4*** *And some of them were persuaded*

This is remarkable! They were unbelievers. They didn’t know the gospel, and some of them were persuaded.

*and joined Paul and Silas,*

They became members of Jesus’ church. And it says, not only these Jews who were in the synagogue, but

*as did a great many of the devout Greeks*

They also were persuaded that Jesus is the Messiah.

*and not a few of the leading women.*

And so a church is established as the Word is proclaimed, but it is established through conversions from the Holy Spirit.

How does it happen that a stranger enters a town with a radical, new message and people change the whole course of their life? I tell you that the only answer to that question I have, is the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit opens eyes to see truth that they previously are blind to. The Holy Spirit transforms the heart so that they believe in Jesus and embrace God to the point of saying, “I’m willing to die for God because I believe eternity is more important than this temporal world. Here’s what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 2.

**1 Thessalonians 2:13** And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

This is not just nice philosophy. They accepted it for what it really is. And that’s the Word of God. This is how the Holy Spirit brings spiritual life. The Holy Spirit takes the Word and He opens hearts to see that this Word is absolutely true. It points to a Savior who is King of kings and Lord of lords, who is worthy of our absolute devotion, who is necessary in order to find life. And it is at work in you believers.

Now notice in this verse he says, “We thank God constantly.” He doesn’t say, “I want to applaud you that when we presented the Word of God, that you accepted it as the Word of God.” He doesn’t thank the Thessalonians. He doesn’t say, “Good job, guys!” What does he do? He says, “I thank God that this happened.” It would never have happened in anyone’s life if God’s Holy Spirit wasn’t creating a miracle to make that happen. I just get on my knees every time I think about me preaching to you for the first time and you receiving it as the Word of God. I get on my knees and thank God. God worked in you. This is the Holy Spirit.

In Philippi, reading in Acts 16, the first convert there was Lydia from Thyatira. And there, the text says

**Acts 16:14** The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

The only explanation of true conversion is the Holy Spirit. You and I can’t convert anyone. It’s the Holy Spirit that must be active. Only the Holy Spirit can produce spiritual life. Only the Holy Spirit can open blind eyes. Only the Holy Spirit can grant us faith, can grant us repentance. We don’t manufacture or create our own repentance and faith. This is why our life overflows with thankfulness to God. I thank God for my own faith and I thank God for your faith. Apart from the working of the Holy Spirit in people, there is no church. None! Everything is empty. Everything is in vain.

Here’s the truth. No church can survive apart from the supernatural working of the Holy Spirit in her midst. The existence and health of the church rests upon the experience of the Holy Spirit converting men and women from darkness to light. A church doesn’tthrive simply because we do the right things in the right way. It doesn’t thrive because we teach the Bible here, because we hold onto sound doctrine, because we live moral lives and obey His practical commands. It’s not because we are a people who are concerned for the poor and the needy. We feed the hungry. We help the sick. It’s not that “We’re thriving because we’re a church that is really committed to going out witnessing. We’re a church that is thriving because we sing the right songs in the right way with the right melodies. We’re a thriving church because we have a nice building, a nice facility, and nice programs.” No! I tell you, no! What is the foundation stone of every church from the beginning of time to the present, in every culture? It is the experience of the Holy Spirit working to bring about conversion, radical life change.

Someone asks, “Should we be experiential in our worship of God?” I tell you, if we are not experiential in our worship of God, we have no part with God. We must be experiential. Jesus said to Nicodemus, “You must be born again.” That’s an experience, is it not? It’s the experience of the Holy Spirit bringing life where there is no life. And unless the church has that experience, there is no church, there is no life. We’re wholly dependent upon God, upon His Spirit.

I understand why some people in the church are afraid of experience. There are demons who disguise themselves as angels of light. There are people who manufacture all kinds of religious experiences using psychological means. But the answer to those problems is not to discard experience, but rather to enter into true experience, biblical experience. It is to test the experience by God’s Word and rejoice in it. We need more religious experience in the church, not less. Amen?!

**Foundation #3: Courage to endure suffering.**

I’ll be short on these last two. I usually am short on the last two points. (Laughter!)

***5*** *But the Jews were jealous,*

This is the Jewish leadership.

*and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason,*

He is one of the followers of Jesus. He is one of the converted men.

*seeking to bring them out to the crowd.* ***6*** *And when they could not find them,*

Talking about Paul and Silas,

*they dragged Jason and some of the brothers*

I love this! Already there is a family. There is a commitment to one another. They dragged out some of the brothers

*before the city authorities,*

I had the opportunity this weekend to meet some brothers and sisters from New Zealand. I had never met them before, some others from other countries. And it’s like, “I love these guys. These are my family.” It’s all based upon the work of God in our midst. So this new family, they bring them out before the city authorities

*shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also,*

I love that! The world needs to be turned upside down. Why is that? Because God created the world right side up. Sin turned the world upside down. And if it doesn’t get turned upside down, it will never be right side up. So we need to be a people who turn the world upside down because it’s already upside down. And it can only happen through the working of God’s Spirit. And this is what they are known for, though. But immediately, they experience suffering for the name of Christ. Jesus predicted this. He said

**John 15:18-19** “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

That’s what Jesus said. The Apostle Paul said “God has said to me,

**2 Corinthians 12:9-10** But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

He’s talking about physical weaknesses. So a foundation stone for every church is courage. It’s courage to endure suffering; to not back away when suffering begins. A lot of times, we perceive, “Well, if God started to make hard things happen for me or in my church, I need to just back away because God doesn’t want me to suffer, does He?” And the answer is, yes He does. And to back away from the work, from the mission of Christ because of suffering, is the wrong path to health. It’s the wrong path to joy. We think it’s the path to joy because we say, “I’m relieved of this pain for the moment.” But it only keeps us from the true joy that is eternal that God has for us as we press into it. That’s why Paul says, “I’m pressing forward, man! There is an upward call. There is a joy that is unspeakable that awaits all who endure.”

**Foundation #4: Commitment to Jesus’ Kingship**

***6*** *And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also,* ***7*** *and Jason has received them,*

He is their friend. He is their family now. And then notice this, because this is the outside world looking in at the church. What does he say about the church, this new church, this new group, this new society, this new family? The world says this about this church.

*and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.”*

They get it! I wonder, when the world peers inside the walls of the evangelical church, do they say, “Here is the thing that really upsets us. They’re acting according to a different set of rules than the rules that we all hold to, the decrees of Caesar. And they’re actually saying that there is another king. And we know His name because they’ve said it often enough and they’ve committed themselves to worshiping Him. And His name is Jesus. And they say, ‘This Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords,’ and we can’t abide by that.” Does the world see that as the issue? It’s a convicting question. It’s convicting for me. But it’s the cornerstone of the church. A foundation stone of the church is a commitment to Jesus’ kingship.

The world didn’t merely see that these folks lived by a different moral code. Undoubtedly, they did. They didn’t merely see that these folks didn’t participate in forms of common entertainment. They didn’t merely see that these folks raised their children with different values. The world didn’t merely see that these folks dressed modestly. The world didn’t merely see that these folks refused to worship other gods. There are many noticeable differences between the lifestyle of believers and unbelievers, but what got their attention? What got their attention was they understood that there was this person named Jesus who they claimed died and rose again. And this person is central. He’s the authority. He is their king. And that bothers the world.

Is Jesus your King? We cannot be a church if Jesus is not our King. That’s the issue. And that’s why we bind hands together and say, “Let us proclaim Jesus as King. Let us live for Jesus as our King. Let us glory in Jesus as our King.” That’s what a real church is. That’s a foundation. A real church is not a place where there are more small groups, better coffee, sharper organization, humorous illustrations, sweeter music. All these things are fine. They are rightly pursued. I don’t stand against them. But they’re not what makes us real. They’re not what makes us authentic. They’re not what makes us genuine. What does, is a conviction to teach God’s Word, to see Christ in His Word. It is conversions, this life change, this transformation that comes about as a result of the Holy Spirit working in us and through us. It is a courage for us to expect suffering, to endure it. It is a commitment to Jesus’ kingship. What is your part?

1. Brothers and sisters, let’s rejoice in God’s Word.

Let’s be a church that loves God’s Word and receives it by faith. In our personal lives and in our corporate life, let’s rejoice in God’s Word. Let’s not say, “Is there another book that is more relevant and more interesting that we can turn to?”

2. Pray for God’s Holy Spirit to work miracles of conversion and consecration in our midst.

I love that Pastor Brian, before he met Alex, he was praying for someone from Saudi Arabia to come to Christ. He was praying for that. Are we praying for conversions? Has that been part of our prayer life this past week? Let’s make it so because it’s what makes us a real church.

3. Endure hardships together for the glory of Jesus.

They didn’t endure hardships alone in isolation. They did it together. Jason and the brothers together said, “Let’s bind arms and let’s take our beatings. Let’s take our sufferings together.

4. Let us consecrate ourselves afresh to Jesus as King and Ruler over our lives.

Let’s pray that God would allow us to be a real church.