



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613
(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

The Glory of the Church, Part 1

Acts 28:23-31

When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet:

"Go to this people, and say, 'You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.' For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'

Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen." He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Matthew 10:16-22

"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

What a joy it has been to walk through this recording of the Acts of the Apostles by Luke with you over this summer. It has been very invigorating for me, and I will tell you that I was kind of emotional this week, coming to the end of it, studying the last passages of Acts. It has kind of moved me in my heart all summer, and I thank God for his living word that does that, that quickens us, that makes us alive in him. I hope it has stirred many of your hearts as we've opened the text and looked into it.

We're talking about the birth, the formation, and the expansion of the Church of Jesus Christ in the world. It is a fantastic institution. Most scholars agree, when they study the scriptures, that God has ordained three institutions in the world.

The very first institution he created was the institution, the social institution, of family. We read about it in Genesis chapter one and Genesis chapter two, where God created mankind in his own image, male and female he created them. And the very first organized governing unit in the world was when God brought the woman to the man. And as they became one before him, the man said, this is bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman, for she was taken out of me.

And then God said this: for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, cleave to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

The first social institution created by God in all of human history is a family unit that begins with the marriage between a man and a woman. Any attack on this is attack on the created order of God.

God eventually had to create civil government to restrain evil in the world. We see Genesis one and two, the creation of family. Genesis three, the fall of the first family into sin. And so now everyone is born into sinful rebellion against God.

The world became very wicked at that time in human history. God loathed that he even created the world, because the inclination of man's heart was only deceitful all the time, and the world was filled with wickedness and violence. And so God decided to cleanse the world with a massive cataclysmic flood, where he wiped out all that he had created, every living creature on the earth, except for those that were gracefully brought into an ark and gracefully ordained by God.

The family of Noah survived, and the human race continued. And just after the flood, God starts to institute now laws to govern us. If you go to Genesis chapter nine, verse six, you will see the first sort of civil law that God gave to humankind. And that was: if a man sheds blood of another man, then that man's blood should also be shed.

God institutes civil government primarily to protect us from ourselves, to protect us from evil. Romans tells us that the governing bodies are there by God's ordination to punish the evildoer and protect the good. And when government reaches well beyond that, we all suffer.

So we have these two institutions that were created. The family was created by God and fell into human sin and corrupted the whole world. Because humanity was designed by God to promulgate, to fill the earth, man and woman could procreate and God's image could be brought all around the globe. But because it's stained with sin, we need governing bodies to restrain this evil and punish evil in the world.

But sandwiched in between the creation of family and the creation of civil government, God hints at another institution — the glory of the church. Because now, as we said earlier, the shadow of death has come over all of creation. But the glory of the church is hinted at when God comes to the serpent who

tempted the first family. And he says to the serpent, the seed of a woman will crush your head. The seed of a woman will crush your head.

Galatians 4:4 tells us about this seed. It says: then later in human history, when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman.

Miraculously, the seed of a woman, implanted by God himself — a virgin nonetheless — the seed of a woman would crush evil's head. Not just restrain it in this world, but do away with it completely, forever. This is the hinting at the church and the eternal salvation of souls forever.

When we read the scriptures, we see that marriages come to an end, if not in this life, then in the next. Family in the biological sense is not needed in eternity. We see that civil government will not be needed in eternity. It comes and goes even in this world. Nations rise and nations fall. But the Scripture tells us the Word of God stands forever, and souls live on forever.

And so God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law — his own law — to do what? To redeem those of us that are under the law, purchase us back from evil, so that we might be his forever and ever.

This is the big thing going on in the world today, friends. I know football just started. I know we had some fun games yesterday. I know there's a lot of news that's promulgated in different ways around our world. But the most important news in the world is what's happening with the souls of men and women for all eternity, as we're in this short time here on the earth. And it's the church that carries the true hope for mankind.

It is the church that Jesus is starting, that we've been looking at in Acts. It is the beginning of this church that continues through this day, through the work of Jesus that is the great hope of humankind. And we've been studying how it began.

Now, this church may at times feel weak in certain parts of the world. It may at times feel anemic in areas. But I can guarantee you, like several civil governments will stop and families will come to an end, biological families, the church itself will never be stopped. Because it is not of human origin, and it's not being run by humankind in the biological sense. It's being instituted and empowered and quickened by the Holy Spirit of the Almighty God.

And Jesus is the one building the church. He's the one who said, I will build my church, the eternal kingdom of God in the hearts and souls of men. And then he said this: not even the gates of Hades, not even the gates of hell, will stand against it. It will be victorious for all eternity.

We are in that time where God is preparing his church. He's preparing his bride for the time he comes again and offers to us the marriage supper of the Lamb. And the people of Christ right now are to bear witness to this truth, bear witness to this reality.

This is the glory of the church. It may not be so prioritized in many human beings' minds, but I guarantee you it is prioritized in God's. It is the main thing he is working on in our world — the building of his glorious church, his body, his people.

We've been studying how this church began when Jesus instituted it, and we've been looking at how the church started in Jerusalem. I have a map that we could put on the screen here. It started way down in the southeast corner of the Mediterranean, there in Jerusalem.

Jesus, after he was crucified and then resurrected, told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until this Spirit, the Holy Spirit, came upon him with power. And then they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, there first in Judea and Samaria, and then to the rest of the known world through the great Roman Empire.

We've seen the Apostle Paul's journey three different times, up through Turkey and Greece, and coming back to Jerusalem. Last week we looked at the fact that he was in Jerusalem. They turned against him there, and they had some trials against him, and the Jewish leaders were persecuting him. So eventually, in Caesarea, he appealed to Caesar.

And near the end of Acts, now we see his journey over to Rome, because they spent a lot of money to send Paul to Caesar for his appeal, as he was promoting the way and speaking about Jesus.

We see Jesus' words come true. I want to read the gospel text again. Many of you who have walked with us through Acts know that all of this happened. Jesus said to them, "I am sending you out like sheep in the midst of wolves."

I don't know why there's such hostility to the gift of Jesus in the world, but if the truth disrupts people's lives enough, they lash out. And we saw that as the truth of the resurrection was promoted in the early church, the wolves came out.

So Jesus said, be as wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Live above reproach. Be savvy. Be smart. Call on the Lord for wisdom.

"Beware of men," Jesus said, "for they will deliver you over to the courts." How many times has Paul been dragged before the courts? How many times has Paul been flogged?

"They will flog you in their synagogues." At times they beat him and left him for dead.

"You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and before the Gentiles."

Last week we looked at how Paul was dragged before Governor Felix and then Governor Festus, and then King Agrippa. And now he's on his way to appeal to the great Caesar — all because he lifted up Jesus.

“When they deliver you over,” Jesus said to them before all of this happened, they weren't to worry about what they were going to say, because the Holy Spirit would quicken them and power them.

The Spirit of the Most High God would give them utterance, and what to say as they stood before the great kings and leaders of the past.

And then Jesus said, it's going to divide families. It's going to cause murders. All this is going to happen, and people are going to hate you if you name the name of Jesus. And it still happens in our world today, friends, it still happens.

But Jesus said, if you endure to the end, you will be saved. When they do persecute you, if you can, just brush the dust off your feet and move on to the next. Look for receptive hearts and pray for those that are hardened.

So Paul is on this journey, and he's found his way to Rome. And we're looking at the very last passage in Luke's recording of Acts.

And in this last passage, as David read earlier, he went first to the synagogue, as he always did, because the Scripture says, God comes to his people first — the Jewish people first. And that's why Paul almost always went to the Jewish people in the city when he went into a city first.

And he asked to have a meeting with them, because he couldn't actually go to the synagogue in Rome, because he was under house arrest, and he was living in a home that he had rented himself. And so he invited them to come to him.

And when the day they had appointed to go to him came, many more people than Paul thought came to him. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying — listen to this — to the kingdom of God, the church, the building of God's family for eternity, and trying to convince them about Jesus from their own history, the Law of Moses and the prophets, which point always to Jesus as the suffering servant to come, the one by whose stripes we would be healed.

He testified to them from their own history about the revelation of Jesus. And as is always the case, some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved.

It was more diplomatic to argue publicly back then over spiritual things. Much of the community revolved around such things, and so they started to argue publicly about whether what Paul was saying was true or not. It's all based on the resurrection, whether that really happened or not.

After disagreeing among themselves, they departed from Paul's residence there, after he made this one statement. This is the very end of Acts.

“The Holy Spirit was right in past history,” Paul said to them, “saying to your fathers through Isaiah and the prophets: Go to this people. Go to him and say, you will indeed hear, but never understand. You will indeed see, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull.”

Rome was rich. The synagogues were organized. They all had money, and the prosperity that they were living in, the order that they were living under, had got them spiritually dull. Their hearts had grown dull. With their ears they can barely hear. With their eyes they have closed, lest they should see. And if they would open their eyes, the prophet said, God would heal them.

And then Paul said this to them, the Jewish people in Rome who were gathered: let it be known to you that this salvation of God, it's been presented to you by God's grace and his kindness, but now it's going to the Gentiles.

And then he just gives this dig. He says, "They will listen." Ever hearing but never believing. It's so sad. Many of them missed the salvation of God, the hope of eternity.

And then Acts ends this way: Paul lived there two whole years at his own expense, and he welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

And Paul would die there. He would be brought before Caesar's court twice.