The Pattern of Church History
(Acts 4:13-31)
9/25/19; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

The Rorsschach test is an exam administered to people to analyze their personality and emotional functioning.

The test was developed by psychiatrist Hermann Rorschach in the early 20th century.

However Rorschach died in his late 30s before test became very popular.

Today, the test is losing popularity, but it is still used by a number of forensic psychologists.

Now what makes the Rorschach test unique is that it is simply a series of inkblots patterns..

The patterns are symmetrical but really don't resemble anything in particular..

But Rorshach claimed that a person's view of certain inkblot patterns revealed all that you needed to know about them.

I am not so sure about that, but I do know that patterns are part of this world.

Most things and lives are pretty patterned.

Most of you have a routine that you have followed for months or even years or decades..

Well, the church has followed a pattern for nearly 2000 years now.

And the pattern goes something like this.

The church grows.

The church finds threats and trouble.

The church trusts the Lord.

The church continues to share the gospel.

The church grows.

That is the pattern and it has repeated itself all over the world for the past 200 years..

And that pattern was set as the church began nearly 2000 years ago in the book of Acts.

We have been there with the early church for a couple months now..

We have see the resurrected Christ ascend back to heaven.

WE have send the promise of Christ to send a Helper in the Holy Spirit fulfilled.

We have seen the first church business meeting to find a replacement for Judas.

WE have seen the church's first and second sermons preached by Peter.

We have seen the first fruits of preaching the gospel as 3000, then probably 10000 people repent of their sin and believe in Christ alone.

But then last week, we also saw the first church persecution as Peter and John were preaching a resurrected Christ to crowds in the temple..

Now we know the answer to the question, but as these early believers watched Peter and John be thrown into jail, they must have thought..

Will this be the end of Christianity?

Will the unbelieving world be able to stop the spread of the Christianity?

Will the church begin to die and soon as it came to life?

And the answer to that is no, but the pattern fo the church is no beginning to take shape..

There will be persecution and trouble for preaching Christ, but that affliction will not stop the spread of the gospel.

In fact, just the opposite will happen..

So let's look at Acts 4 tonight, and find 5 principles that will guide church history..

Let's begin in verse 13-18 with…

I. The World Will Resist the Gospel (13-18)

As we arrive at verse 13, the church is very young..

Maybe even just a day or a week old, having begun with the arrival of the Spirit at Pentecost.

So it is late May or early June in Jerusalem in Acts 4.

Peter and John have spent the night in jail, having been arrested for preaching about a resurrected Jesus in the temple.

Now remember, we are less than two months removed from Jesus being in this same temple turning over tables at Passover.

So, Jesus' name is not liked too well by the temple priests or temple guards..

Furthermore, there is now a conspiracy among the Jews to cover up Jesus' resurrection.

The last thing that the Jews want is someone in the temple claiming that Jesus is not dead.

As a result, the temple priests and guard and rulers rushed over and had Peter and John arrested because they were preaching the resurrection of Jesus from the dead..

The following day, Peter and John stood before the Sanhedrin, a group of 70 religious leaders of Israel.

This group was headed up by the high priest Caiaphas, and everything in Judaism was under its rule.

However, Peter and John saw the situation as an opportunity to preach Christ to their fellow Jews, and that is exactly what they did..

Look back at verse 8 of Acts 4..

8 Then Peter, [c]filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "[d]Rulers and elders of the people, 9 if we are [e]on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, [f]as to how this man has been made well, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that [g]by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—[h]by [i]this name this man stands here before you in good health. 11 [j]He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

This is incredibly courageous preaching.

These 70 men had just sent Jesus to the cross less than 2 months ago, and now is Peter is reminding them of their guilt and lack of salvation..

And we noted that gospel preaching in this era will be bold but also very simple.

And that is exactly what Peter does here..

So how will this group of 70 Jews react to Peter's preaching?

Verse 13..

13 Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them [k]as having been with Jesus. 14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had nothing to say in reply.

The first response to Peter and John is simply amazement..

Here were two fisherman from Galilee speaking like well trained priests from Jerusalem.

Now remember, John was known to the high priest.

In fact, that is how he was able to get into the trial of Jesus on the night before the crucifixion.

And no fishermen like Peter or John were able to stand and speak with such authority..

Now why did these men confident and speaking with authority and education?

Simple.

Look at the end of verse 13..

They had been with Jesus.

And they were now preaching with the same authority and confidence that Jesus preached with.

And look, Jesus' authority in his teaching was what always amazed the crowds..

Matthew 7:28-29

28 [t]When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; 29 for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

And now here are the men with Jesus preaching with confidence, even though they are untrained and uneducated.

Though the Sanhedrin would never admit it, something was going on here.

These men were preaching with the same authority as Christ.

But they were also healing with the same power as Christ..

Verse 14 says that the healed man was standing with them as they stood before the Sanhedrin.

I mean this is turning their world upside down.

They thought that killing Jesus would end his ministry and influence, but now he has been dead for 2 months but people are still being healed in his name and Peter and John are preaching in his name..

And you can tell their amazement by their response..

End of verse 14…

They had nothing to say in reply.

Sometimes, silence says more than words, and no 70 of the world's greatest Jews have nothing to say..

In fact, they are so stunned, they send Peter and John and the formerly lame man out of the room, so that they can talk..

Verse 15..

15 But when they had ordered them to leave the [l]Council, they began to confer with one another, 16 saying, "What shall we do with these men? For the fact that a noteworthy [m]miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17 But so that it will not spread any further among the people, let us warn them to speak no longer to any man in this name." " 18 And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all [n]in the name of Jesus.

So 70+ of the supposedly brightest minds in Judaism confer and their plan is to simply tell Peter and John to keep their mouths closed about Jesus..

Now look, this seems like a trivial verse, but this is still the mindset of the unbelieving world.

Unbelievers are still actively trying to silence those who speak in the name of Christ.

Though our own culture has been spared from this since its inception, we are closer than ever to seeing the silencing of Christians here.

I never thought I would go to a football game and not hear a prayer before it, but now it is unusual to hear someone pray.

I never thought prayer would leave the public school system, but now it is complexity gone.

I never thought local governments would open and close without prayer, but now the majority of them do.

And on and on, we could go in our country of how believers are being silenced from speaking in Jesus' name.

Yet, this has been the case in the world since Acts 4.

The pattern of the church is to see save souls saved, and then see those same souls silenced from speaking about Christ.

So how will Peter and John respond?

II. The Church Will Respond to the Threats (19-20)

Verse 19..

19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; 20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

Every Christian has a responsibility to the authorities over them.

The Sanhedrin ruled Israel, and Peter and John were Jews.

But even authority has limits, and those limits end when authority commands Christians to disobey the Word of God.

So Peter and John tell this group of Jews that they can charge them with not obeying their orders, but ultimately they were going to obey God's orders.

And God had commanded them to go and make disciples of all the nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

And they were going to obey Him and not them.

Besides, they cannot keep silent in light of that they have seen and heard in the life of Christ.

Now look, this is the pattern of the church.

WE will obey and submit to the authorities over us up until the point that those authorities can us to disobey the Lord.

And then, we will obey God and not man.

Look, a child is commanded by God to submit to their parents but that command doesn't apply when a parent forces a child to sin.

The same would be true of a spouse or an employer or a church leader..

Look, I think that submission to authorities is sorely lacking in the lives of many Christians, but I also know that authority figures can abuse their position.

And when that abuse leads those under them to sin, that authority is no longer recognized.

Peter and John submitted to authority, but when that authority led them to disobey God, they pledged allegiance to God.

Now, this doesn't mean believers are exempt from worldly punishment.

Disobedience to authority has consequences in the world.

But Peter and John were willing to accept the consequences of man to avoid greater consequences from the Lord if they didn't speak.

And today, we should be just as committed to speaking Jesus' name as they were..

As we should be willing to speak no matter the costs..

Higher tax bill, fewer job opportunities, arrests, legal prosecution, jail time should not deter us from speaking Jesus' name..

Besides, what can man do to you?

Jesus said to not fear the one who can kill the body. Instead, fear the One who can destroy the body and soul.

A third principle that has been true throughout church history is this..

III. The World Will Ride the Fence (21-22)

Look at verse 21..

21 When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; 22 for the man was more than forty years old on whom this [o]miracle of healing had been performed.

Though the Jewish leadership would have preferred to kill Peter and John, they couldn't.

And the simple reason was this.

The crowds were amazed at the miraculous healing of man who had been lame for over 4 decades.

It is not like Peter and John helped him to his feet and he took a few steps.

No, they told him to get up in Jesus' name and he raised himself and walked and leaped and ran into the temple.

And what is interesting here is this..

The crowd recognized that God was working through these men, and we know that because the end of verse 21 says that the crowd was glorifying God because of the miracle.

Now the irony is that the religious leadership wasn't glorifying God because of the miracle.

Instead they were interrogating the men that God used.

How corrupt is your religion when those who are supposedly closest to God don't recognize what He is doing in the world.

How corrupt is your religion when the people praise the Lord for his work while the leaders persecute those who do His work.

The bottom line is this scene is that the leadership caves to the people.

The won't keep Peter and John in jail simply because the people would go crazy..

Instead, they release them on account of the people.

This demonstrates the cowardice of unbelief.

Instead of standing, unbelief bows to the crowd.

Just like Pilate in John 18 & 19, these religious leaders of Israel ride the wave of public opinion and let Peter and John go.

This is the fickle nature of the world.

Public opinion polls matter more than absolute truth.

The fear of man is greater than the fear of God.

This has always been the case.

Now sometimes that has been good for the church, but we are now in an era where the church is the enemy of the world.

We do not hold the beliefs of the world.

We do not value what the world values.

We do not believe what the world believes.

And we are now on the wrong side of the world's fence.

There is a popular saying in the world today, where people are told to not be on the wrong side of history..

It is meant to pressure people to side with the majority view.

But I can assure you that I don't care about being on the side of history.

But I do greatly fear being on the wrong side of God.

The world will ride the fence, but we must stay on the side of the Lord.

A 4th principle of church history is this..

IV. The Church Will Rejoice in the Sovereignty of God (23-28)

23 When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O [p]Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 25 who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said,
'Why did the [q]Gentiles rage,
And the peoples devise futile things?
26
'The kings of the earth [r]took their stand,
And the rulers were gathered together
Against the Lord and against His [s]Christ.'
27 For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy [t]servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the [u]Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

As Peter and John find freedom, they head back to be with their fellow believers..

And this reminds us that encouragement in the church age is found in fellow believers.

We may be forced to stand before the world, but we rest with God's people.

This is the blessing of the church.

We come here to rest and be encouraged and be strengthened.

There is one overarching principle of persecution.

The more the church is persecuted, the stronger the church becomes.

And the reason for the strengthening is two fold..

First, the church grows closer together as believers seek shelter from the world.

Second, the church is purified because those faking it won't stick around if there's a chance they could be afflicted.

Now the early church didn't have many fakers because it was too costly to join..

But you have to love the community of these early believers.

They are arrested and jailed and when released, they don't run away, they run to the church.

And what do they do?

They praise the accuracy of God's Word.

Verses 25 and 26 are from Psalm 2.

In that psalm, God predicted a day when the the rulers of the earth would oppose the Messiah..

6
'The kings of the earth [r]took their stand,
And the rulers were gathered together
Against the Lord and against His [s]Christ.'

And now before their very eyes, this psalm was coming true in a literal way.

This wasn't just poetry.

This wasn't some psalm that had symbolic meaning.

This was a poem written centuries ago, and now it was literally true in Jerusalem.

The ruler of the earth and the kings of the earth were opposed the Lord and His Christ.

And now these early believers simply praise the Lord that His word is exactly accurate..

But they also praise the Lord's sovereignty..

Verse 28..

28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

Not only was the God's word perfectly accurate, so was the predestined plan of God to send Jesus to the cross.

This early church is doing what many need to be doing today, which is exalt the word of God and praise the sovereignty of God.

The church functions well when we value Scripture and recognize the absolute power of God to do as He pleases.

Sadly, church get in trouble when they forget what the Bible says and then rob God of His sovereignty.

These early believers knew their Bible and they knew their God.

We would be well advised to follow their pattern.

A final principle of the church age is found in verses 29-31..

V. The Church Will Request God's Help (29-31)

On the heels of seeing the exalting the word of God and praising the sovereignty of God, the church prays boldly…

29 And [v]now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, 30 while You extend Your hand to heal, and [w]signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy [x]servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

It is no coincidence that a high view of the word of God creates an absolute confidence in it.

This early church saw the fulfillment of Psalm 2, so that asked God to help them speak the Word with all confidence.

Let me tell you something.

If I had any doubts that any word of this wasn't accurate, I couldn't in good conscience stand before you and preach it.

But the Bible has proved itself true over and over and over in the world and in my life.

So I am able to stand and preach it with confidence.

But I also am able to preach it with confidence because I trust in the sovereignty of God to use it in the lives of the people who hear it..

Verse 29 is a request for confidence to speak it, and verse 30 is a request for God to use His Word to impact the world.

I have often said that preaching is an unusual event.

I stand and you sit.

I speak and you listen.

I send and you receive.

But it is an event that God uses to accomplish His will in the world.

We don't have a pulpit simply because every church has a pulpit.

We don't set aside time for preaching simply because every church sets aside a time for preaching.

We have a pulpit and preaching because God sovereignly uses His word in the lives of His people to

sanctify them and in the lives of unbelievers to save them.

This has been the practice of the church from the very beginning and it should be the practice of the church today..

Conclusion

So what do we resolve to do in light of these verses?

#1 - Fear the Lord.

The fear of man paralyzes us.

The fear of man causes us to close our mouths.

The fear of man leads to bad decisions.

We must be kind and patient and gracious in the world, but we must never speak and act based on our fear of what man can do.

Instead, we must fear the Lord and seek to please Him no matter the cost.

#2 - Face the music.

Just because you do the right thing, there is no guarantee that God will relieve you of the consequences.

Sometimes you will stand for him but still feel the heat of the world.

Even when we stand for Him, God doesn't promise to always rescue us from earthly trouble.

But we always know that whatever we face, He is with us and will it for our good.

#3 - Fall on the church.

I can tell you this Pine Grove.

If our culture continues in the direction it is going, Christian persecution will sky rocket.

Loss of jobs and incomes, higher taxes, criminal charges may be in the works for those who stand on absolute truth.

And when those things come, the false converts will be exposed and the true believers will be encouraged by other believers.

One day, the church may be what it was in the first days.

It may be a place of shelter and comfort from the persecution of the world..

For churches in other places in the world, the church is already that.

But it may be coming here soon.

#4 - Find your strength in the Savior, Scripture, and sovereignty.

In the end, we are called to proclaim Christ, trust in the Word of God, and rest in the sovereignty of God.

The early church had very little.

They were often poor and afflicted.

But what they had was a Savior.

Peter and John said that they could not speaking about the Christ that they had seen and heard.

They also had the OT Scriptures, which proved that what was happening was the plan of God.

And they also knew the sovereignty of God, which reminded them that God had predetermined a plan and was now bring that plan together before their very eyes.

They simply needed to preach the message of a Savior, exalt the Word of God, and trust in His sovereignty.

May we do the same.

Let us pray.