

New Loyalties

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[0 : 00] don't tell me what to do. Don't worry, policeman. I wasn't speeding that fast. I wasn't really breaking the law.

Don't worry, doc. You don't really need to tell me what to do. I know how to take care of myself. It's been fascinating watching people's response to the medical recommendations and directions about social distancing, staying home, sanitizing hands, wearing masks.

Some people want to ignore everything. It's that attitude of, I don't care about your authority. I don't want to wear a mask. It's uncomfortable. I want to make decisions for myself.

And there is a temptation to think that these directives don't apply to me. I'm the power and authority over my life. I'll make up my mind when you show me the evidence.

And I feel this pull about whether I'll make up my mind, whether I'll be the one that makes decisions for me. I feel this battle. But I'm wearing this mask not because I've done the study, not because I have researched it and found how helpful masks are, but because I'm trusting other people when they recommend that it is best to keep ourselves safe and to protect other people.

[1 : 20] Also, after shaving off my beard this week, I've found the mask is actually really warm on my face. It's been a little bit cold recently. But we all know the temptation of watering down Christianity to make it easier.

That says, Jesus, I will follow some of your recommendations, but I will pick and I will choose. It makes it easier. It makes it more palatable, less confronting to other people around me.

I'll continue to be the one that makes the decisions and has the power, but Jesus, I'll allow you to advise me. But when we make Jesus just one of the voices in our life, Christianity gets watered down to something that has no real value for us in our lives.

Here in chapter four of the book of Acts, the apostles Peter and John are threatened because Jesus is the power and they are warned to water him down. Give some authority over to the rulers of the time.

But Jesus has been given all of the power, all of the authority over the universe, over our culture, over the Christianity, and even over each of our lives.

[2 : 34] And there is a very real battle that happened to them, to Peter and John, and a very real battle that happens to us now in the life of the church and in our lives. Who is in charge?

Is it Jesus or is it me? Who will I submit to? As we continue in our series on looking at living in the new world, today we're going to see what it means to have new loyalty, what it means to be loyal to Jesus and to follow him.

First of all, we're going to see today, we're going to look at Jesus' power and his authority before we see the call to submit and then we see the prayer for boldness in this life.

Please have your Bibles open on your phone through the St. Paul's app in a physical Bible. We're in chapter 4. In chapter 3, at the end, we saw Peter heal a lame man.

And then he preached to the crowd about repentance. Repent so you can have times of refreshing that come from following the Jesus who was raised from the dead. And at the start of chapter 4, the Sadducees with the temple guard hear Peter's preaching and they don't think very much of it.

[3 : 49] The Sadducees were a Jewish sect who didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. And to deal with this problem, they arrest Peter and John, put them in prison because it was night, and then deal with them the next day.

But despite this persecution, God is doing amazing things. Acts chapter 4, verse 4. But many who heard this message believed, so the number of men who grew to about 5,000.

But is only a three-letter, very small word. But it is very big here. Despite arrest and persecution, despite the ruling religious authorities disagreeing with the preacher and arresting him, despite the apparent craziness of believing in the resurrection of the dead, thousands believe.

It's all because Jesus is working. Peter and John have been arrested. The ruling authorities gather the next day, verse 6. Annas, the high priest, was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and others of the high priest's family.

These are the people who saw Jesus put to death. They did not acknowledge Jesus' position and his authority as the Son of God, and so they put him to death.

[5 : 10] Verse 7. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them. By what power or what name did you do this? Now, this is more than asking about how the lame man was healed.

This is a question of power and authority. By what power or what name? In the first century, you didn't have gods that were considered to be over the whole world or the whole cosmos.

Gods were considered to be regional. You had the god of war, the god of agriculture, the god of love. There was the god of Ephesus, the god of Corinth.

It was a system which said, everyone is right. Everyone can have their own regional god. You can follow your god. That is fine.

It's called religious relativism, where there is no absolute power. There is no one religion that is right. But all of the regions, they've got their own religion, and they were all valid.

[6 : 11] We see the apostle Paul fight this battle in Acts chapter 19, where the silversmith, Demetrius, was against Paul because he worshipped the god Artemis, the god of fertility.

He was also worried about his job as a silversmith. But he was worried about this god of the region in Ephesus. Each religion had permission to preach. They were licensed.

They had authority to preach under the ruler Caesar. And in one sense, he was considered divine because he was the one ruler over all of these regions.

He was the one ruler over all of these regional gods. And so the religious leaders, the Jewish leaders, are questioning Peter and John, likely with the thought in the back of their minds that the Romans didn't like them too much.

And they didn't want to see two upstarts like Peter and John causing riots, causing the Romans to come down hard on them. And so the question, by what name, by what power do you preach, is much bigger than just how did this happen.

[7 : 19] It's a question of loyalty. It's a question of who do you submit to? How do we control you? Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, answers this question of whose name and power in verse 9.

It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.

Jesus is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

It is the Jesus that you crucified. Again, this is the third time now that Peter has laid the blame at his listeners' feet. He's done it with the crowds, saying that they were responsible for Jesus' death, and they were.

But these are the men who orchestrated Jesus' death. They were the ones who were worried about their own position. They were jealous of the crowds that Jesus was getting.

[8 : 24] So these were the very men who were the ones who orchestrated it. And so Peter says, you crucified Jesus, but God raised him.

You threw him away like a piece of garbage, but God has made him the cornerstone. The cornerstone marks the orientation and location of a building, and everything is built off it.

Jesus is the first. Everything finds its place from him and in relation to him. And Peter makes an exclusive claim. Salvation is found in no one else.

It's found nowhere else. He is the way, the only way to get saved. And this might seem like a really offensive and arrogant claim, but it is more the implication of the resurrection and his ascension.

If it is really true that Jesus was raised from the dead, then he has been given power above all powers. He is the cornerstone. He is the only way to be saved.

[9 : 35] But this absolute and ultimate claim was offensive to the Jewish religious leaders. It was offensive to the other religious leaders and to Caesar, and it certainly continues to be offensive to people today to say that Jesus is the only power, the only way to be saved.

Today in our 2020, that's the year isn't it? Today in 2020, our culture might not be based on regional gods and regional deities, but their claim to absolute truth that Jesus is the only power, the only way you can be saved.

That claim is still very offensive. People will say, oh, well, look, you can believe in your Jesus, you can worship him, but not this cornerstone all-powerful version.

That's intolerant to other people and the way of life that they follow, to say that you must follow Jesus and he's the only way to be saved.

That's intolerant. Can you please just water down your view of Jesus until he is the nice and kind prophet of love version of Jesus? That's much more palatable, that's much nicer, it's much less offensive.

[10 : 54] You have your prophet of love version of Jesus and everybody else can have their own view of God and it will be fine. There's just one problem with that. That kind of Jesus doesn't exist.

the Jesus we have in the Bible is the same one that Peter is preaching about. Either Peter is right that Jesus is the name above all names and he has all the power or there is no one.

There is no version of a Jesus in history who was just a prophet of love and peace who was not the son of God. The rulers hear about this Jesus and it's interesting because they actually don't argue theology instead they want Peter and John to water down their theology they want them to submit you can follow your Jesus I suppose but we want you to submit to our authority that's our second point today don't submit to another's power and authority verse 13 when they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized they were unschooled ordinary men they were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus now this reads like a dig at these men you're not educated you're not smart like me I think it reads like that for me in particular but it's more like they could tell that they didn't have the same religious education and yet

Peter is here debating theology he is calling him the cornerstone who was prophesied about they don't have the same education and yet they somehow are educated and Peter has the courage to stand up to the people who saw Jesus killed and what they realize is that in a sense they have been taught theology they've been taught by Jesus himself and they couldn't argue they couldn't ignore what had been done because the man who was lame was right there and he was over 40 and Luke makes a real point of this that that is quite significant that he was over 40 and he was healed I'm five years off that so I I'm kind of happy to joke about that number at this point people who were that old did not get better in the first century they died something miraculous must have happened they can see that Jesus name has power and authority over diseases and

Jesus wasn't even there in person the rulers realized that they have no case against these men to stop them and so instead they just try and bully them submit to our power verse 18 then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or to teach at all in the name of Jesus I'm going to command you not to speak submit to us you follow us we're the religious rulers water down your view of Jesus and don't talk about him anymore he's commanded you to be a witness of what you have seen and what you have heard how about you don't if you know what's good for you we are the authority here instituted by God in the line of Abraham and Moses we are warning you very seriously to stop this don't submit to Jesus submit to our power and authority be loyal to us first and then follow Jesus second there are many countries where religious freedom is limited and controlled by the government continues on today where people are considered to be criminals for their faith locked up just like

[14 : 39] Peter and John were sent off for re-education not because they have done anything wrong but because they follow a religion that says that the government is not the ultimate power Christianity is threatening to the power of governments it was true of King Herod when Jesus was born and it continues to be true today Christians that choose to submit to Jesus first and not to the government are dangerous however Christians want to seek to love and be peaceful and honouring and not just tear down like a government would be concerned but ultimately submit to Jesus and it's the same question that the religious leaders put to Peter and John who will you submit to it's also true of Sydney not in an organised government way necessarily but in our culture it's not politically correct to say that

Jesus has an exclusive claim on salvation it's not nice people don't like it people will say that it's offensive it's insensitive it's intolerant people say be careful if you say that you will get cancelled and harassed remove all the insensitive aspects of your Christianity water your Christianity down so it can fit into society because our culture believes that everyone is right no one view is more valid than all the others our culture argues your version of truth can't be right because it's exclusive my view of truth has to be right which is that all views are equal but the only problem is they're arguing against a truth claim with a truth claim they're saying you can't make this truth claim that Jesus is the power you have to believe my truth claim that all truth is valid many don't like

Jesus claim that he is God because it's an absolute so instead replace it with everyone's view Peter and John's response to the power played by the Jewish leaders shows where they put their trust and I really love Peter's response here verse 19 Peter and John replied which is right in God's eyes to listen to you or to him you be the judges as for us we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard it is so simple and direct we will do what God tells us to do and how could these religious leaders argue with that Peter has proclaimed Jesus power they have been bullied to submit but now they pray for boldness Peter and John are amazingly released from prison and they head back to this young church that is growing but still forming and that in itself shows how much change has happened in

Peter's life Peter when he was questioned about whether he was submitting to Jesus at Jesus' trial Peter flees now after Peter has been put on trial he stays and he goes back to the church verse 24 he prays reflecting God's power and authority sovereign Lord they said you made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them you spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant and father David why do the nations rage and the people's plot in vain they see the actions of the people around them as no surprise but that God is still in control what what would what would you would you pray for an easy and quiet life would you pray for the ability to worship in peace to be left alone of prying eyes of those who were against you as a church that is attempting to get used to gathering again faced with constant change now wearing masks do we just ask for the government to leave us alone so that we can meet in peace they instead prayed lord verse 29 consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness they're not worried about themselves they're not worried about their state or the danger of persecution they know that

God is sovereign and instead they pray for boldness to speak God's word they don't ask for boldness to understand how to fit into their culture how to water down Christianity so that they aren't persecuted there isn't a question of God's power but their desire to see Jesus known verse 31 after they prayed the place where they were meeting was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly they just prayed that God would help them to speak the word of God boldly and they get that they are filled with the Holy Spirit and they start speaking the word of God boldly we need boldness to speak God's word to each other to ourselves to the people on our front lines to the one plus one plus one person that we are praying for because we want to see people saved and God uses us to speak his word to them but we can be fearful and we need to be praying for

[20 : 33] God's boldness and we need boldness to be willing to say that Jesus is the power over all powers regardless of the cost in 2005 a cancer patient Georgia Hayes won a 2.2 billion dollar court settlement against her pharmacist because her pharmacist had been diluting her chemotherapy drugs with water in the process she had lost her best chance for her recovery what should have been saving her life the chemotherapy drugs was in fact doing nothing for her the most deadly way to follow Jesus is having a watered down gospel following a politically correct prophet of love in offensive version of Jesus that kind of Jesus will not make an impact on your life or the world we live in that is not the Jesus that is of the

Bible he is too small and too weak he is irrelevant and the church that follows him will be emaciated and impotent unable to do anything but huddle together that is not the picture of Jesus we see in the Bible the church dared to challenge the authorities to challenge Jesus is powerful he has died for us he has been raised and he has promised that he will raise us too years ago while I was training in martial arts I was sparring with my master at the time and he did a really wonderful kick that I just did not see coming and it went straight into my face and I went down on the floor and had to go to the GP sent me to a specialist and it turns out I fractured my cheekbone and when

I was speaking with the specialist he advised me you might have some nerve damage in there we are most worried about your eye dropping and losing your vision don't worry it's okay my eye hasn't dropped it's okay I can see the shock on all of your eyes right now but your cheek hasn't been fractured that badly so your eye hasn't dropped but you might have some nerve damage but it won't do you any harm so we could do some surgery if you like to fix that but you don't need it and and and and it left me thinking what do you mean and so I said to him hang on you're the specialist you tell me what to do I I'm not trained to be I haven't trained to be a GP and then to have specialized look I can go and check Google that's that'll give me some helpful medical advice I'm sure but you tell me what I need God has made us humans with a will and we are responsible for what we choose but let's not over estimate our

God given intellect and will as if we know what is best for us in our lives let's not be people who think we know best and water down a life following Jesus the best life he has for us but to know that Jesus is the Lord because he is life itself let me pray dear heavenly father Lord I thank you for the reminder from Peter and John that we can stand firm in the face of opposition in the face of people trying to persecute the church and Lord I ask that you would help us to submit to you like Peter and John did and father we ask that you would give us boldness to speak your word father we long to see people come to know and love you we thank you that you invite us to be your servants to work for you in this mission Lord father help us to witness to what we have seen to witness to what you have done in our lives through your son and help us to boldly proclaim your power and your awesomeness we ask this in your son's name amen