

DANGEROUS FAITH

Discussion Notes

ROMAN CANDLES

The central point is Philip's talk was that the existence of the Church is a convincing argument for Christianity. That is not only survived but against all odds grew exponentially and has done for thousands of years is a great reason to believe.

- Have you ever considered this before?
- How does that add up against your normal ideas about the Church? How does the idea that the church is a remarkable miracle compare to our ideas about what church is like today?
- Does hearing the story of the early church help build your faith? How does this work for you as evidence for the resurrection and the truth of the gospel?

Read through Acts 4:1-22. As we focused more on the history of the church we didn't get much of a chance to reflect on the amazing things this passage can teach us. Spend some time reading this, you might want to break down into smaller groups to do so. You can really make this a large bulk of your time together. Reflect on what we can learn from this passage for our communities today. What can it teach us about conviction, courage, community and how we live these out in Hub life?

Philip explained how the Early Church faced two big challenges that make its growth even more extraordinary. Recap these challenges together.

1) MONOTHEISM.

The Jewish people defined themselves as being a fiercely monotheistic people. Whilst every other religion had many gods, Jews were separate and found their identity in believing in just one God. Yet the church, who suggested that Jesus was fully man and fully God, grew out of this culture.

As part of this culture, there was a theocracy whereby the priests had supreme power. They beat and stoned Christians for challenging their views. Despite of these challenges, Christianity flourished in this culture.

2) PANTHEISM

The wider Roman world held the view of pantheism; that there are many gods and each person or tribe can believe in whomever they want. This meant each follower of Jesus had to turn from their own individual god and challenge a culture that said that there is no objective truth.

However, on top this, the Roman Empire held up their rulers as gods who everyone had to bow down to and worship. The Christians refused to do so and so many were killed, for example Emperor Nero set Christians on fire and used them to illuminate his garden parties.

- How do these two challenges relate to life for us today? Does the challenge to 21st century Christians look more like the challenge of pantheism or monotheism? Or neither?
- What does the spread of the Church in these conditions tell us about the truth of the Gospel?
- What was it about the Early Church that meant that they could continue to spread the Gospel in the face of these extreme challenges? How does that make us rethink our faith?

So what does this mean to us as Christians? Philip asked the question 'how can you just treat faith as a supplement to your normal life when you have this lineage of sacrifice and you are part of the miraculous growth of the Church?'

- Have you considered this challenge before? What difference should it make to my life knowing that I am part of the history of a Church that has grown enormously despite all the challenges?
- What is the 'Roman Candle' for us? What does sacrifice look like in our lives?
- What stops us from living with the same zeal that the Early Church had?

Finally, take time out to pray for each other and for your unchurched friends and colleagues. Who can we invite to other parts of this series? Would any be intrigued to view the baptism special? Pray for the Holy Spirit to give us boldness as he did for the early believers.