

Acts 4:23-31

“Praying with Confidence in the Sovereignty of God”

Intro:

The papal envoy once threatened Martin Luther with what would follow if he persisted in his course and warned him all of his supporters would desert him in the end. “Where will you be then?” They asked. “Then as now,” Luther answered, “in the hands of God”

What we see here is an unshakable confidence in the sovereignty of God.

And I submit church, that’s what the world needs to see in us.

- the world at its worst, needs the church at her best

- and we are at our best when we have an unshakeable confidence that the Lord is ruling and in control

1st prayer recorded in Acts. We know they devoted themselves to it

I. What moved the Church to pray? (Acts 4:23-24a)

A. Recap Acts 3

1. Acts 3:6
2. Acts 4:2
3. Acts 4:13
4. Acts 4:19-20
5. Acts 4:23

B. “They went to their friends”

- literally means their own
- they went to church
- possibly in the Upper Room

-This is an essential mark of true faith: genuine love for the people of God

- You can test your faith by where you turn for support, encouragement, and companionship in difficult times

C. “Reported what they had been told. And when they heard it, they sifted their voices together to God”

- when threatened, they did not give in or shut up or lay low
- they prayed
- in accord in prayer
- this should be our battle plan for spiritual warfare
- notice the leaders didn’t tell Peter and John not to minister
- but not to do it in the name of Jesus
 - this is the attack that we face— same spirit of overthrowing reign of God
 - what shall we do?
 - follow the example of the text— they didn’t quit, scheme, fight, organize, protest, or boycott

“What a friend we have in Jesus”:

“Oh, what peace we often forfeit, Oh, what needless pain we bear

All because we do not carry, Everything to God in prayer

Have we trials and temptations, Is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged, Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful, Who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness, Take it to the Lord in prayer

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer.

In His arms he’ll take and shield you; you will find a solace there”

II.. What did the church pray? (Acts 4:24b-30) (longest and most dramatic)

*It begins with addressing God as Sovereign Lord (despot) (person w/absolute power)

- used to refer for a master of slaves who was the lord of the house
- used in the NT for the supreme power of God's divine rule
- thats the sense of the word here
- When they called on the Sovereign Lord, they affirmed his total control, perfect authority, and impeachable jurisdiction over everything
- after the authorities gave them a threat, they got together and prayed to a sovereign Lord

*2 Major sections: Invocation and Supplication

A. Invocation (v.25-28)

- Praises God for His sovereign acts
- They begin by telling God what God had already done
 - They didn't fear that God had forgotten what He had done
 - It exalted His glory and built their confidence by telling God what He had already done
 - Good place to start— tell God about God

This prayer declares 3 ways the God has put his Sovereignty on Display

1. 3 Ways God has put His Sovereign Rule on Display:

a. The Creation of the World (v.24)

- Creation is the first theater in which God displays His sovereignty
- Heavens above, earth around, seas beneath
- creation of the world affirms His sovereignty
- The one who creates a thing, rules over the thing He created**
- Psalm 24:1-2- The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.**
 - Everything belongs to God, in the sky, on land, in the water therefore;
 - No rebellious creature can withstand Him
 - In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, In the end He will reign over heaven and earth
- They declare the creation of the world, then

b. The Revelation of Scripture (v.25-26)

- Through Biblical Revelation- the manner (they way revealed) (25a)**
- v.25- "who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit"
 - Divine inspiration of **2 Timothy 3:16**
"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness"
- God is the source of scripture
- The bible is not man's word about God, it's God's word to man
 - Yet it's God's word through man
- God spoke through David— used his intellect, personal, and conviction
- The Holy Spirit superintended the process to make sure only what God wanted said was said

-2 Peter 1:21-“ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

-Because of this we see the perfect harmony of Psalm 2 of David and Acts 4 writing by Luke. This NT quote of OT Psalm

-We have affirmation of the Trinity here

-God the Father speaks through man by God the Spirit to proclaim the person and work of God the Son

-through the message of Scripture (v.25b-26)

-verse 25-26 quote Psalm 2:1-2

- Psalm 2 rebellion against God’s anointed King and chosen people

-prophecy of the coming Messiah-King

-v.25 ask... quoting Psalm 2 speaking of humanities futile attempt to overthrow divine authority

-rage- neighing horse bucking in rebellion that would have to submit to the one who holds the reigns

-plot in vain

-v.26- the kings of the earth..rulers..against

-United Nations

-kings/president/foreign diplomats

-conspiring together to get rid of God

-grassroots and authorities trying to overthrow rule of God

-Psalm 2:4 tells us how he responds:

-while the entire earth is conspiring in rebellion against God’s authority

-notice he doesn’t pace are heaven, meet in his briefing room to organize military response, not moved to an undisclosed location for his protection

-Psalm 2 tells us that He is right now where He has always been

-“it says he who sits in heaven laughs”

-it’s too late...

-Psalm 2:6- I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill

-Jesus reigns

-this is why we can pray with confidence

-Psalm 2:10-12

-The praise God for the fact, rejoice in the face that God is in control

c. The Crucifixion of Jesus (Acts 4:27-28)

-verses 27-28 directly apply Psalm 2 to the crucifixion of Jesus

-parallels are obvious

-a few months prior to this groups came together against Jesus

-Herod and Pilate became friends this day

-but not just in the courts of authority

-v.27- along with Gentiles and Jews

-individually and corporately, sinful humanity plotted to execute Jesus

-notice what v.28 does not say does not say...

-it does not say they fulfilled their plots..and they did

-it says the got together “to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place”

-biblical tension of human responsibility and divine sovereignty
-this text doesn't acquit those who were responsible for the death of Jesus

-it declares all humanity guilty

-yet it asserts something greater was going on beyond sinful acts of men

-Jesus didn't die as a religious nonconformist to the Jews or a political nuisance to the Romans, He died according to the plan of Almighty God

-the crucifixion happened as God predestined it to happen

-they key word is “whatever”

-sinful man did only what the Sovereign Lord permitted

-nothing more/nothing less

-John 19:10-11- ‘So Pilate said to him, “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” 11 Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above”

-the same is all who trust in Jesus

-nothing has changed

-the enemy can only do to you what God allows

-we are living in a day where we witness the culture turn even more in hostility toward the Word of God and testimony of Jesus

-we panic thinking we've lost home court advantage

-be reminded of this:

-Romans 8:31- “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”

B. Supplication (v.29)

***finally we get to what they are asking for**

***Maybe we don't see revival because we don't pray like this**

***we are preoccupied with our own needs and troubles and wants**

***they had a lot of stuff to talk about but spent most of their time talking to God about God: His greatness, authority and sovereignty**

***This prayer is 7 verses. The first fives exalts the sovereignty of God. The final 2 record actual prayer request**

***this is the model we out to pray when the burdens are heavy, crisis is mounting, and enemy is threatening**

***Talk to God about what He is doing more than about what the enemy is doing**

***Focus on God so that you won't focus on the situation**

***Gaze at God and only glance at Goliath**

***After exalting God's sovereign rule the made 2 request:**

***2 Prayer Request:**

1. A Prayer of Resignation (v.29a) (general)

a. “Lord, look upon their threats”

-notice what they did not pray (to stop, prevent)

-these were not idle threats, they meant them

-they were serious when they commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus anymore

-yet they prayed, "Lord, look upon their threats"

-Assyrian king sent a letter to King Hezekiah (Isaiah 36/37)

-not to trust in his God because He couldn't save them

-Isaiah 37:14-17 records what Hezekiah did after reading it

-The messenger brought the letter, he read it and said this isn't about me

-so he took it to the Lord and say, Lord, he is talking about you

-I thought you may want to know what the enemy is saying about you so you can handle your business

*that's the sense of this prayer from the church, "lord, look upon their threats"

-this is not about us, it's about you.

*this is how we should pray when life gets too hard.. **GIVE IT GOD**

2. A Prayer for Spiritual Boldness (v.29b) (specific)

a. *"Grant your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness"*

-we see the priority of the believers

-they were more concerned with pleasing god and exalting Christ than about their own safety

-live or die... the word of God had to be proclaimed

-could this be why the gospel isn't advancing in our city?

-could this be why we seem irrelevant? Pressure to look as much like the outside world in order to try to reach the world?

-could this be why so many in the church are only going through motions without experiencing change?

-We lack spiritual boldness

-that starts with the leadership of the church

-pastors aren't bold enough.. deacons... leaders...

-we are comfortable with the status quo... suffer from the fear of man

-we are more concerned with being criticized or rejected than pleasing God

-we suffer from the fear of man more than the desire to please God

-we choose the path of least resistance

-we claim to trust in the sufficiency of Scripture but we fail to operate as if it is

-the world at it's worst needs the church at it's best..

-we aren't at our best if we lack boldness to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ

-may we corporately and individually repent of our self-reliance and pray for spiritual boldness

b. Notice they prayed for what they already had

-v.13- they were astonished at the boldness of Peter and John

-yet they prayed for boldness

-they were wise enough to know: "yesterday's grace will not work for today's challenges

-there are time we need to look back and remember what the Lord has done

-but there are also times that we need to forget what lies behind us

-yesterday's success, todays complacency, tomorrows failures

-no matter how bold you've been in the past, don't stop praying

-thank God for yesterday's grace, but we need future grace to help what is before us

-we can't say what we ought to say or do what out to be do unless God gives us spiritual boldness

III. What happened when they prayed (Acs 4:31)

- A. God did something around them
 - Acts 2:2, God made his presence with a sound of heaven like a mighty rushing wind
 - Acts 4, God made His presence known by shaking the place they were in
 - It was a sign that He was with them
 - the more he shook the building, the more unshakable their faith became
 - He showed them he has everything under control
 - God doesn't always need to shake a building, sometimes it's a still small voice like with Elijah
 - we should pray for God to be obviously present. Actively in charge, and dynamically at work
 - But here is the point, God is with you and there is nothing He can't handle
- B. God did something in them
 - “they were filled with the Holy Spirit”
 - not the same as indwell, baptized into the Spirit... He takes up residence
 - it was a fresh infilling, that enabled power to resist, serve faithfully, and endure persecution, live obediently, witness boldly, suffer joyfully
 - 120 at pentecost, Peter before Sandhedrin, now all the believers
 - commands of Ephesians 5:18- And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,**
 - command for all believers
 - how would this place be if we were all filled with the Spirit
 - it literally means, “controlled”
 - we have the commandment to be “filled”
 - results from yielding ourself to the Spirt
 - important because of Acts 5- ananias and Saphira were “filled”
 - D.L. Moody was asked if he was filled with the Spirit, He responded, “yes, but I leak”
 - so do we all..
 - we need to be continually filled with the Spirit
 - when we yield our self to the Spirit, He will fill us.. take control
 - it happens through prayer
- C. God did something for them
 - “the believers continued to speak the word of God with boldness
 - v.29 tells us they prayed specifically for boldness
 - .v31 tells us that God specifically answered their prayer by enabling them to continue in boldness
 - God hears and answers prayer
 - this happens after we pray
 - we can do many things to help after we pray
 - we can do nothing to help until we pray
 - when we work, we work
 - When we pray, God works

Ephesians 3:20-21- Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.