

Praying the Believers' Prayer

Acts 4:24-31

(Series: Reimagining Church; Message 13)

²³On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

*"Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
²⁶The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord
and against his anointed one."*

²⁷Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. ²⁹Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

³¹After 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.

Message:

We're re-imagining the 21st century Church in light of the 1st century Church. We're imagining what the Church might look like, if we took the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our life and faith community seriously.

So after a couple of introductory messages on praying and waiting, we spent the first month (September) talking about the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Last month (October) we focused on the early Church's *Rule of Life* - i.e., the practices of the early Church that kept them walking close to Jesus and empowered by His Spirit. We noted the early Church was fully devoted to the *apostle's teaching* (i.e., to the Gospel), fully devoted to the *fellowship* (to the community), fully devoted the *breaking of bread* (calling people together around a table of forgiveness, grace, and blessing), and fully devoted to prayer (for God's Church, Mission, and Kingdom). We noted it wasn't multiple choice, it was "all of the above!"

This month, we're looking at the Church's mission. What is the work of "Church" and its members? **Two weeks ago we talked about the five *marks* of the first disciples on mission: Prayer, Passion, Power, Persuasion,** and God's **Presence** marked their life. Last week we talked about the *message* of the church - that the resurrection of Jesus means God is changing everything and making all things new!

This morning we'll focus on the *method* of the mission - prayer!

Read Acts 4:23-31

Jeremiah Calvin Lanphier was hired by the consistory of the North Dutch Church as a lay missionary. Attendance was down; the budget was tight; they were desperate. Lanphier was hired to (re)fill seats in the church.

He started knocking on doors; he stopped people walking the streets; he scheduled activities and outreach programs at the church. Nothing worked. So he decided to invite the local businessmen to the church to pray on Wednesday from "noon-to-one o'clock" in the consistory room.

The first person arrived a half-hour late; four others even later; they represented five denominations; the agenda - prayer and praise for "the salvation of the soul." They prayed for family members, neighbors and co-workers who needed Jesus—by name. Others would join by praying in agreement. They praised God for his answers. No oratory (i.e., no speaker talking on prayer) and no arguments (theological discussions) were allowed - just praying.

The next Wednesday, twenty attended; the third week forty and they moved it to the worship center; the fourth week a noon prayer meeting was held every day. Within a couple of months, prayer meetings were being held throughout the city; a few months later, throughout the nation; and within the year, throughout the world. Millions would come to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior through the prayers of God's people.

This revival is known as the *Fulton Street Prayer Meeting*. It sparked the *Second Great Awakening*.

The North Dutch Reformed Church (now Marble Collegiate, RCA) still stands in Manhattan, New York, just a few blocks from One World Trade Center.

That first prayer meeting was held on September 23, 1857. On September 23, 2007, I had the privilege of being a part of the 150th anniversary celebration in New York City with leaders from churches all over the world who had been impacted by this revival started by one man answering God's simple call to pray.

The theme of our gathering in 2007 became our prayer, "God, you did this; do it again!" Only believers can pray that prayer; only believers can pray for the salvation of others; only believers can pray for a move of God's Spirit; only believers can pray kingdom prayers. Believers need to pray these prayers. This is the method Christ gave us to fulfill his mission, to enlarge his church, and to build his Kingdom. God loves to answer these prayers!

The greatest action we can take in any situation is to pray. Sadly, the last action we usually take in any situation is to pray... I've been in many congregational-wide prayer meetings with only two or three others. I've been in prayer meetings where we prayed for physical healing; for blessings on our meetings/activities; and for protection for our missionaries - but seldom hear anyone pray for the salvation of someone's soul [esp. by name] or for boldness to proclaim the Gospel.

It is time to bring **praying boldly** for people's **souls** back into the fabric of our lives, back to a priority in our churches, and back to political correctness in our nation. Why should it take a bad diagnosis, the loss of a job, or a fractured relationship to get us to our knees? Why should it take a downturn in giving, a decline in membership, or a schism? Why should it take a recession, a natural or terrorist disaster, panic about our politics, or a worldwide pandemic for us to unite in prayer?

THE DISCIPLES' PRAYER

A couple of weeks ago, we followed Peter and John into the Temple to pray. On the way in, the Spirit opened their eyes to see a crippled beggar sitting by the gate. Peter struck up a conversation with the gentleman and apologized for having no money to give. Then Peter healed him: "*In the name of **Jesus** of Nazareth, get up and walk!*" When people saw the lame beggar walking and leaping, they were amazed. Everyone asked, "Who did this?"

Peter got up and answered: "**God** did it! *The God of our Fathers!*" I.e. the same God who led us - his people - out of the bondage of Egypt. I.e., the same God who sent his Son Jesus into this world to lead us - his people - out of the bondage of sin. I.e., the same God who you demanded be crucified; he was, and our God raised him from the dead three days later. He has returned to his Father's side. You need to repent; turn to God; receive forgiveness so your soul can be redeemed and refreshed.

When the religious leaders realized Peter was preaching about Jesus and the resurrection of the dead in their Temple, they had him and John **arrested and thrown into **prison**.**

The next day they were brought before the Sanhedrin and asked, "*On **whose** authority are you doing and saying these things?*" Peter (once a cowardly lion) tells the rulers, elders, and teachers of the law: "*God did it! The God of our Fathers!*" I.e. the same God who led us - his people - out of the bondage of Egypt. I.e., the same God who sent his Son Jesus into this world to lead us - his people - out of the bondage of sin. I.e., the same God who you demanded be crucified; he was, and our God raised him from the dead three days later. He is now back at his Father's side.

You (the religious leaders) need to repent; turn to God; receive forgiveness so your soul can be redeemed and refreshed. Peter summarizes his answer: "*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved*" (**Acts 4:12**)

The religious leaders consult about an appropriate punishment. They want Peter and John to stop talking about Jesus and the resurrection of the dead, but are hesitant

because everyone can see the miracle God just used Peter to perform. They decide to **threaten** Peter and John to **not** to speak about Jesus anymore.

Peter says: *It's not going to happen. This is about what God did. We'll be listening to what he wants instead of what you want. Just so you know, He's going to do it again and again until he makes everything new.*

So they were released. Luke says they went back to their friends.

Peter and John report everything the religious leaders said to their friends. They don't strategize about how to overthrow or undermine the Sanhedrin. They don't organize a demonstration (although the people, t that moment, were on their side). They don't seek legal counsel to file suit (what happened to freedom of speech?). They go to **prayer** and ask God to **do it again**: *"Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus"*

THE APOSTLES' PRAYER

The apostles' pray for boldness. Their confidence comes from two things: (4:24-28):

First, their confidence comes from God's **sovereignty** (Acts 4:24b - *"Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them"*). They found consolation and assurance in the **sovereignty** of God - knowing and trusting that God controlled human events - in spite of how it looked on the surface.

They had found wisdom and insight in going - as Jesus so often had - to the **Scripture** where they found that the opposition they were experiencing God had predicted hundreds of years before. The **Psalmist wrote (2:1-2)** - *Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain. The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his anointed one.*) What Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, even Israel had done against Jesus (and now against them) was just like God said it would be.

The Psalmist reminds us God places his chosen people in the middle of the warring and violent nations of the earth as a sign of his coming kingdom ("making all things new") - the sovereign rule through which he will eventually bring peace and justice to the world.

In quoting Psalm 2, Peter is not just finding a text to bolster their confidence, he is citing a specific text that graphically and powerfully proclaims Messiah is the Son of God and is destined to rule the whole world. (In Romans 1, Paul will reiterate that in the resurrection, God demonstrated Jesus was his Son, the Messiah of the seed of David, and that Jesus was Lord of the whole world and claims allegiance from all people).

The disciples found comfort and encouragement knowing everything that was happening was part of God's **plan**. God was simply working out his plan. He would keep doing it. They found empowerment and confidence in knowing their God was so powerful he could move enemy **nations**, to accomplish his plan - anytime, anywhere he wanted. "Confident praying" comes from rooting our prayers in the Scripture - God's infallible Word!

They begin praying by invoking God as the “maker of heaven, and the earth, and the sea and every thing in them.” Then come the words of the Psalmist. Then they face the situation before them - acknowledging that even the apparently disastrous things that happened to Jesus and are now happening to them - were not outside of God’s will (4:28). God can (and does) turn human wrath into his praise.

The modern lie our individualism is that boldness comes from within us. It does not! It comes from without; it comes from the Spirit of God.

Second, their confidence comes from the **power** of **Jesus’ Name** (Acts 4:27 - “*Through the name of your holy servant, Jesus*”). In chapter 3 of **Acts 29**; Terry Teykl underscores the power of Jesus Name. He notes:

- 1) The **nature** of God is revealed...in *the name of Jesus*.
- 2) We have access to the **throne** of God...in *the name of Jesus* (**John 16:23** - “*I tell you the truth, whatever you ask in my name, my Father will give you*”).
- 3) Like all covenant relationships, *the name of Jesus* symbolizes our **standing** with the **Father** (**John 17:6**).
- 4) The **authority** “*to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease*” (**Matthew 10:1**) is in...*the name of Jesus*.
- 5) We know we belong to God because *the name of Jesus assures me of eternal life* (cf. **H.C. 1**)
- 6) We are protected from evil and have **power** over the evil one in *the name of Jesus!* (**John 17:11-12**).
- 7) *The name of Jesus* reminds us we have been born again, and having been filled with his Spirit, we are to bring **honor** and **glory** to his name here on earth.

The Apostles’ pray for boldness and power *in name of their Lord Jesus Christ!*

With this knowledge and foundation, they bend their knees and **pray together** (**Acts 4:24**). In **Acts 4:29**, they pray: *And now, Lord, look at their threats, and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness*. They long to be bold; the more bold they were, the bolder they wanted to be. The more they prayed for boldness, the more God gave them boldness: “*We want more: more of you, more of your kingdom, more of your power*” (i.e., “*Do it again, Lord, do it again!*”)

Father, you empowered Jesus. His crucifixion and resurrection are testimonies of power. You empower us with you Spirit; your church is already over 5000; you miraculously healed a lame man; You released us from prison. These are all testimonies. Here is our prayer, Lord: “*You are sovereign. You save! You did it! Do it again!*”

God answered their prayer: *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 (4:31).*

They hadn't asked, but God shook the place where they were praying: *As I shake this room, I will shake Jerusalem!* Less than forty years later, the Romans would surround the city, toss the stones of the Temple and set fire to it.

As I shake this room, I will shake Israel! Qumran, Masada thousands of lives lost; the priesthood broken; the Israelites will be scattered everywhere. . .

As I shake this room...I will shake the world! Acts 29 is still being written

In this prayer meeting, the old order is confronted by the new order and we begin to see the impact of Christ's resurrection - a shaking room - a reflection of the Spirit's quivering joy at the impartation of holy power!

This passage reminds us there is a **mighty power** at work in this world, a force we can depend on, a Risen Messiah who will ultimately make all things new, a Lord calling us to **proclaim** the Word of God with **boldness**; a people empowered by God's Spirit, and a God who answers prayer - often in dramatic fashion!

THE BELIEVERS' PRAYER

Some Christians long to bring prayer back to the schools, marketplace and government entities; truth is, we should bring prayer back to the Church first!

Jesus said, *My house shall be a house of **prayer** for all nations.* Many agree but don't spend much time helping build it. Prayer meetings are traditionally poorly attended; our prayer times are short and infrequent. If we make prayer the primary focus of our being together, people no longer come.

The single greatest resource of spiritual power God has entrusted to believers and to his Church is prayer. It changes the course of history; it initiates revival; it transforms people's eternal destiny. *Do it again, Father!*

For most of us, prayer hasn't (yet) become a part of our **DNA**. Perhaps it is because we don't connect prayer to the **mission** of the church, to bringing in the harvest, or to taking the Gospel to every nation. Perhaps we've forgotten that unless people find salvation in Jesus Christ they are eternally lost. Perhaps while we acknowledge prayer is important; we're not yet convinced it's essential. Perhaps since we believe God is sovereign, we don't think our prayers make any difference or God doesn't really answer our prayers...

Luke summaries the three facets of *confident praying* for these believers:

First, they acknowledged there was a significant issue: there are threats; there is opposition. But you, Lord, were already aware of them w before they even occurred. You've planned for it; you've experienced it. There will always be threats - they are the currency of this world. They reflect the anxiety of those who spew them out in an attempt to control others, religious decisions and political movements. May we never acquiesce.

Second, allow us go on speaking about you boldly. We need to be faithful. We need your strength.

Third, Father, continue to work powerfully. We trust in your power, not ours. We can't possess it, but because of Jesus, use us to point people to the new thing you are doing.

The Church in every generation needs to learn afresh what it means to pray with this kind of bold confidence. (No one goes looking for persecution, but when it comes, it needs to push us back to the scriptures, to prayer, and to the power and presence of God. The Church today desperately needs that sense of God's power blowing out the cobwebs, filling us with the Spirit, and giving us a renewed boldness).

What if we prioritized prayer in our lives and in His church... Would we also experience God moving in ways unlike we have seen before? Would God experience release his Spirit on this church, unleashing this church to making a greater impact on this community? Would God bring us to our knees in confession and bring renewal to our nation? Would God use us to bring in a rich harvest, to initiate a revival, and to bring lost souls to Christ... Yes! Yes! Yes! And Yes! But not unless we pray.

The challenge is to be **bold** in our personal prayer lives so we can be solid blocks in building a bold-praying church together. If we do not plan to pray, we will not pray; if we can't be bold before a God who loves us, how will we ever be bold before the enemy. It is time to see what God can do through us. . . .if we engage in God's prescribed **method** of ushering in his kingdom - prayer!

The Christian life was not designed to be bland or boring, comfortable or predictable. If that is your assessment of the Christian life, you're probably not doing something right! **Following Jesus** requires boldness. Changing the world requires boldness. **Saving souls** requires boldness. If we ask, God will provide that boldness for us.

The blessing of Pentecost is boldness; the infilling of the Spirit brings boldness. The fact that God is the Creator of everything allows for boldness. Asking in the Name of Jesus fosters boldness. Being one in Christ means boldness.

As Christ-followers, we need to shake some people and places up; we need to shake up this community; we need to shake up this nation. The message of Christ crucified and risen is designed to awaken and **change lives**, to awaken and change institutions, to transform communities, cities and nations.

It needs to get told. We need to tell it. That requires boldness. Boldness comes from God through prayer. Do it again!

Toward the end of his life, Peter shares his testimony (1 Peter 3:13f). Historians say Peter experienced tremendous persecution and was ultimately crucified upside down. Listen to his words: *Now who will harm you if you are eager to do good? And even if you suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened. But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks from you an accounting for the hope that is in you.*

Peter was transformed from a cowardly lion into a bold witness for Jesus. God answered Peter's prayer; God used Peter to advance his kingdom

God did it with **Peter**. God did it with the **lame man** begging by the Temple gate. God did it with **Jeremiah Lanphier** in New York City. God can do it with you and me. *God, do it again. Do it here with **us!***

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