

Praying for boldness * Acts 4:23-31

June 10, 2020 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

Have you ever wanted to share your faith with someone but just couldn't get up the nerve? Like, maybe you were afraid of how it would affect your relationship, or maybe you were afraid that they'd think less of you because of it, or maybe you were just a little scared to share the Gospel.

I know I've been there – I can think of a couple of times when I've thought – 'I really need to share Jesus with this person' – and yet I've chickened out at the last minute. And I don't feel good about that. As Paul says in Philippians 3, there is nothing greater than the joy of knowing Christ and the stakes are eternal; where do we get the boldness we need to share the Good News about Jesus with others?

That's the question at the heart of the passage that we're going to look at today - Acts 4:23-31.

Now just before our passage, something really incredible happens. Peter and John are on their way up to the temple to pray (early church - devoted to prayer) when they come across a beggar asking for money. Peter says – 'Look, I don't have any money, but what I do have, I will give you' and he takes the guy's hand and says 'in the name of Jesus, walk.' And this guy, lame for forty years, can walk.

The people are astonished and they rush around Peter and so Peter says to them – 'this is the power of God at work. All of the promises God made in the OT; well, they've been fulfilled in Jesus, and when you turn from sin to follow Him, you will experience God's saving power too.'

That's good news and a lot of people come to believe (Acts 4:5), but the religious elite in Jerusalem were not so impressed and so they had Peter and John arrested. They couldn't very well do anything to punish them though, because all they'd done was miraculously heal a guy and point people to God in light of it, so, after Peter preached to THEM too, they just kicked 'em out with an empty threat.

And what happens next is where I want us to focus. Acts 4:23 says that Peter and John went back to their own people and shared with them everything that had happened to them. And you know what they did next? They didn't plot revenge, they didn't pack up their bags and get out of Dodge; they didn't start a petition on change.org; they prayed. Verse 25 – "They raised their voices together in prayer to God."

And here's what they prayed:

"Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.

25 You 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?

26 The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. '

27 Indeed 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.

28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus" (Acts 4:24-30 NIV).

They didn't pray that God would smite their enemies. They didn't pray that God would relieve their suffering. They said 'God, give us boldness to speak your word to people who need to hear it.'

That's really interesting to me – because if you boil down a lot of our prayers, our prayers often amount to 'God, make my life better.' But here, the church is praying 'God, make us bold to share you with others.' That's a big difference isn't it? And I think that it's rooted in an unshakeable confidence that God will should and will prevail. Because look again at their prayer -

"Sovereign Lord, Creator of Heaven and Earth and all that is in them" – right off the bat, they're saying 'God, there's no one more powerful than You!' They are implicitly acknowledging that their God is in control.

Sovereign Lord, people have always resisted you. That's the point of Psalm 2, that's the general trend of the whole OT and that's certainly what happened to Jesus –

Sovereign Lord, people have always resisted You but You work even through their resistance! Herod, Pilate, the religious elite, they freely chose to murder Jesus and yet verse 28 - 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Nothing happens outside of the will of God and even apparently evil things can advance God's kingdom.

Sovereign Lord, people have always resisted You but You work even through their resistance! They're doing it again. The religious elite are trying to shut your word down but shutting us down.

Sovereign Lord, Creator of all things, who works even through resistance, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

Peter and the Church are not thinking about boldness as an inner characteristic that's found in us; they're thinking of boldness as the logical outcome of being the servant of the sovereign God who works all things for good. They literally pray 'God GIVE us boldness' in light of who YOU are.

And then – this is important - 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

They recognize the extent of their part in this project – God gives them boldness to share the good news but then it is God's job to do a miraculous work in people's hearts. I think sometimes we hesitate to share the Gospel because we think we need to convince people to come to faith. This though teaches us – no – God makes us bold to plant the seed; He's the one that gives the growth.

We go to God for boldness and then pray that He would work.

That's this prayer – they say 'God, make us bold to stand up to these threats and faithfully tell people the good news about Jesus' and then they also say 'we depend on You to do the rest.'

Verse 31 - 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. (Act 4:31 NIV).

I think that this is an important message to hear. Even if we're not facing persecution, we still need boldness to share the Gospel. Where does that boldness come from? It comes from God, who makes us bold and does the work. We go to God to make us bold and pray that He would work.

I want to encourage you to do that in your own life – to go to the Sovereign God, who works even through opposition – and say – 'God, nothing is impossible for you. Give me boldness to do my part and give me faith to let You do Yours.'