

BE BOLD / Sunday, September 6, 2015

Unifying Topic: PRAYING FOR ONE ANOTHER

Lesson Text

I. A Futile Plot (Acts 4:23-28)

II. A Prayer For Boldness (Acts 4:29-31)

The Main Thought: And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:31, KJV).

Unifying Principle: At critical times in their lives, people search for strength to weather the storm. Where do they find the necessary strength? The followers of Christ raised their voices together to God in prayer, and the Holy Spirit filled them with strength to speak God's word with boldness.

Lesson Aim: To review how the apostles prayed for strength to speak the Gospel with boldness despite the threat of persecution and political duress.

Life Aim: To gain insights into prayer as a means through which Christians can remain strong voices for change and effective ministries in their communities today.

HISTORY:

Acts 4:1-22 Peter and John spoke to the people of Jerusalem, while the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came near, for they were grieved that they taught the people, and especially preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead (that in Jesus the dead rise). This was a doctrine in which the Sadducees violently opposed (**vv.1-2**). They looked on as they laid hands on the people, so, they arrested them until the next day: for it was already evening. But many of the people that heard the Word believed; now reaching to a high number of about five thousand (**vv.3-4**). The next day the rulers, the elders, scribes, Annas, the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, many of relatives of the high priest, gathered together at Jerusalem—known as the Council or the Jewish Sanhedrin—a legislative body of 71 members headed by the high priest. They could condemn to death, but could not execute. This was done by the Romans alone. They had brought Peter and John before them asking, "*By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?*" (**vv.5-7**). Peter, being filled with and guided by the Holy Spirit, said to them, "*Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we are examined today for doing a good deed for a lame man, as to how this man was healed. Let it be known unto all, and to all the people of Israel. It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified; whom God raised from the dead. It is even by His authority that this man stands here before you healed* (**vv.8-9**). *He is the stone despised and rejected by you builders. But He has become the Cornerstone. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*" (**vv.10-12**).

When the "Sanhedrin" saw the boldness of Peter and John, they could see that they were obviously uneducated; unlearned and ignorant men. The word translated "unlearned" means that they had no kind of technical education. The word translated "ignorant" means that they were laymen with no special professional qualifications. They were amazed and realized what being with Jesus had done for them! They couldn't deny the tremendous miracle for the man had been healed and standing right there beside them. So they sent them out of the Council chamber and discussed among themselves (**vv.13-15**). They were asking each other as to what should be done with Peter and John. And the Council could hardly discredit the healing, for everyone in Jerusalem knew about it, but perhaps they could stop the doctrine of the Resurrection from spreading. From 120 praying people in Acts 1, the church had already increased to over 5,000. They didn't want it spreading any further. So they thought if they threaten them: don't keep spreading this and don't speak this name to anyone again. They called them back in, commanding them never again to speak nor teach in the name of Jesus (**vv.16-18**). But Peter and John boldly replied, "*Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than God, then you judge, for we cannot but speak the things which we see and heard.*" We are sometimes afraid to share our faith in God because people

might feel uncomfortable, disapprove, or reject us. But Peter and John's zeal for the Lord was so strong that they could not keep quiet, even when threatened. So the Council then threatened them further and finally let them go because they didn't know how to punish them without starting a riot, for everyone was praising God for this wonderful miracle which was done—the healing of a man who had been lame for forty years (**vv.19-22**).

LESSON:

Acts 4:23-28 A Futile Plot

4:23 And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. After being threatened by the Sanhedrin and finally released, Peter and John returned to where the other disciples were gathered, and reported to them all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.

4:24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:— When they had heard the story, with one accord they lifted up their voices unto God. We can learn from the manner in which the believers praised God. First, they called God the Lord of everything, saying "*O Lord, Creator of heaven and earth and of the sea and everything in them.*"¹ They were reminding themselves that He made everything.

4:25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?— They said words are from a psalm that David wrote (Psalm 2:1-2). "*By the Holy Spirit You spoke through the mouth of your servant and our father, David...*" These believers were Jews, so, they called David their "father" because he was a famous king in Israel. *Why did the Gentiles rage, and the people busy themselves with empty things; plan their little plots against Almighty God?*" The "Gentiles" in the psalm were the Romans.

4:26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. They continued, "*The kings of the earth unite to fight against him and against the anointed Son of God!*" David wrote this psalm about 1000 years before Jesus' birth. His prophecy there about the Messiah had now happened. And some people in the psalm wanted to stop Jesus. By quoting this passage, the Christians were affirming their agreement with God that the people of the world have always hated the Lord.

4:27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,— They continued praying to God, "*That is what is happening here in this city today! Herod the king, and Pontius Pilate the governor, and all the Romans—as well as the people of Israel—are united against Jesus, your anointed Son.*"

4:28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done. They continued, proclaiming that these things were predestined by God, yet human beings who did them were morally lawless and responsible for their evil deeds, yet, they still needed to repent. They did what was already determined by God's hand and purpose. This prayer reflects both a deep acknowledgment of human responsibility and a deep trust in God's wisdom in His sovereign direction of the detailed events of history. "*To carry out what your hand and Will had destined should happen.*" No matter the plots that come against us, they will be unsuccessful because God has a perfect plan destined for us.

Acts 4:29-31 A Prayer For Boldness

4:29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may

¹<http://www.easyenglish.info/bible-commentary/acts-lbw.htm>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>

speak thy word,— Notice how the believers prayed: First they praised God (vv.24), quoted His Word back to Him (vv.25b-26), then they told God their specific problem, and asked for help (vv.27-29). The Sanhedrin were threatening them, and they needed God to grant them the boldness to continue to speak His Word. They did not ask God to remove the problem, nor pray against those who persecuted them, but prayed for help to deal with it. Boldness required courage to press through the tears and do what we know is right. Like the disciples, we need to pray with others for that courage and pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to give us that courage. Then when the opportunity comes to speak a Word, trust God!

4:30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. The word translated "heal" is used elsewhere twice by Luke and by no one else in the New Testament. This offers good evidence for the authorship of Luke. The disciples' prayer comes with a petition "*that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child.*" They wanted more miracles as they continue to proclaim the gospel. They knew that when God stretched forth His hand upon any situation, signs and wonders would come to glorify Him!

4:31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. Well, what do you know? They finished praying and God answered their prayer. The place they were assembled in was shaken as if it were an earthquake, and the Spirit filled them. With increased filling came increased boldness to speak the Word of God. The Holy Spirit's power did not come on them automatically, but it was in answer to their expectant believing prayer.

SUMMARY:

Peter and John spoke to the crowd gathered around Solomon's colonnade in which the priest, the captain of the Temple came near, and the Sadducees seized them. After finally being released by the Sanhedrin, Peter and John returned to the other disciples reporting to them all that had occurred. When they heard their story, they lifted up their voices to God united with one accord; praising and praying (**vv.23-28**).

Their desired three things from God: 1) to grant them the boldness to continue to preach His Word; 2) for Him to stretch forth His hand to heal; 3) and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. By the time they finished praying, God had answered their prayer. The place they were meeting in began to shake. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and boldly preached God's message. They went through a trial; had a prayer meeting, and came out in victory (**vv.29-31**).