

Bold Prayers, Bold Mission

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 July 2023

Preacher: Pastor Bart Leger

[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, church, and everyone that is watching and listening online. We're glad to have you with us this morning. Can you imagine the scene?

Peter and John, two of Jesus' closest disciples, returning from an intense encounter with the religious leaders of their day, and the room is full of the hushed anticipation as the door opens.

And all eyes are on Peter and John as they step into the room as the believers have been anxiously awaiting to hear what has happened.

They've just faced the authorities, the very same people who orchestrated the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. So how do we respond?

What do we do when we're told that we can't talk about Jesus? What do we do when we're told to be quiet and not say what we believe?

[1 : 0 6] Do we retreat? Do we compromise? Or do we gather together as brothers and sisters, and do we pray for boldness? And ladies and gentlemen, we are stepping in this morning into the encounter of Peter and John with the religious leaders, and as they come back to their fellow believers and let them know what has happened, we're about to step into one of the most powerful moments of the early church, a moment of challenge, a moment of unity, and a moment of supernatural boldness as they pray in response to what they were told by their religious leaders.

So let's journey back this morning to the roots of our faith as we learn from the early church how they responded to opposition. And it doesn't take much imagination today if we read what is going on around the world with the persecuted church, as we read about how people who are told that they can't talk about Jesus or they may face death.

So it is simply a short step away from what the early church was experiencing in their day as we consider how do we respond to the challenges today.

So get ready, church, as we dive deep into this account, into the heart of the early church's reaction, and see how their bold prayers led to a bold mission.

Let's take a look at our text this morning. I was telling some guests this morning that we go through verse by verse through God's Word. We are in the book of Acts this morning, chapter number 4, and looking at verses 23 through verse number 31.

[2 : 5 7] Verse 23 says, And being let go, talking about Peter and John, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

So when they heard that, they raised their voice, the body of Christ raised their voice to God with one accord and said, Lord God, you who made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them, who by the mouth of your servant David had said, why did the nations rage?

And the people plot vain things. The kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ, for truly against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do, listen to this, to do whatever your hand and your purpose determined before to be done.

Verse 29, Now, Lord, look on their threats and grant to your servants that with all boldness they may speak your word by stretching out your hand to heal and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

We heard that a few verses back where the lame man had been restored. They said, get up, he said, get up and walk. And the religious leaders asked, well, by whose name did you guys do this?

[4 : 38] They said, Jesus. Jesus. There's power in the name Jesus. Verse 31, And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with what?

They spoke the word of God with? Boldness. They wanted to tell others about who had changed their life. They wanted to tell others about who had taken their broken lives, who had taken their emptiness and made something brand new.

So they wanted the world to know what God had done, what Jesus had done in their lives. So they spoke the word of God with boldness. So what was the response of the early church to opposition?

Well, here's what it is. They were united in prayer. So they were anxiously awaiting Peter and John to hear what had happened. Peter and John walk in, I am sure, to their hushed anticipation, and they were waiting with bated breath to hear what Peter and John said.

They warned us not to speak about Jesus. So all together they said, let's pray. Let's pray for God to give us boldness to go out and to continue to share Jesus with others.

[6 : 03] They were united in prayer. Look at verse 23. And being let go, they went to their own companions, and they said all that the chief priest had told them. Verse 24. So when they had heard that, the church together raised their voice to God.

What do we do when things go wrong? What do we do when things get difficult? Well, we should. But most often, what do we do?

We wring our hands. What are we going to do? Oh, my. Oh, well, what will happen if? We do that a lot. Well, what will happen if, well, we might get in trouble?

We might get put in jail. We might, we might, well, what happens if? And all too often, we are controlled by our fears rather than controlled by the Word of God, the Holy Spirit of God.

And so when the church heard that they were being opposed by the religious leaders, they said, well, first thing let's do, let's pray. Let's pray to God for more boldness.

[7 : 12] And so they prayed, you are the God, Lord, you are God who made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them. Peter and John, upon release, didn't tremble in fear.

Instead, they gathered the fellow believers together. They shared their experience and collectively, they just raised their voices to God. Now, we can learn from their response.

When faced with opposition, our first instinct should be to go to God in prayer. God, you know, this didn't get you, this didn't catch you by surprise. You, you know, what was going to happen.

Ideally, we do this in unity with fellow believers. We don't come, we don't go out separately and pray to God separately, which we can do, but what they did was when they faced opposition, they came together.

They came together as a family of God. They came together as the body of Christ. You see, they had a common enemy. Who is our common enemy? Talk to me this morning. Satan.

[8 : 15] Satan. Exactly. Paul said, for we wrestle not against flesh and blood. You see, people are not our enemy. People are not what we're fighting against.

The body of Christ comes together, and what did they do? They said, we have a common enemy. It's Satan. And Satan is operating through these religious leaders, and they want to silence us.

They don't want us talking about Jesus. They want to silence us so that, as we said last week, this Jesus thing would just die its own death. You know, if we can quieten them down, silence them, and make them bow down, then maybe this thing will just go away, and we can continue like we've been doing all along.

When faced with opposition, our first instinct should be to pray, and ideally in unity with other believers. It was a united prayer meeting. What do we see?

They raised their voice to God with what? With one accord. They were together. They were in unity. The people were of one heart, one mind, and it pleased God to answer their request.

[9 : 28] God shook the place. Holy Spirit, fill them once again. They didn't need the Holy Spirit again. They already had the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowered them, filled them, controlled them even more.

Division in the church always hinders prayer and robs the church of spiritual power. You see, the church is God's plan A. God doesn't have a plan B.

God's plan is not to use para-church organizations, although they have their role.

God's plan is not to use non-profit organizations to do all the things that they're doing, although they have their place. God's plan to reach the world as a church.

God's plan to reach the world through the gospel of Jesus Christ is the body of Christ. It's the church. Consider the church in Afghanistan. It's an Islamic state by constitution.

[10 : 35] It's a country that doesn't permit any other faith other than Islam. As a matter of fact, to convert to another faith from Islam is tantamount to treason because it's going against your family, your tribe, and it's going against your own country.

And very often, there is only one possible outcome for those who begin to follow Jesus. Potentially, it's death. And we hear the stories over and over again about that. But here's the thing.

The church in Afghanistan is growing still today. According to the mission organization Operation World, the secret church in Afghanistan is rapidly multiplying despite opposition.

And Afghans are coming to know Jesus Christ. And much of it is coming through Iranians who are coming in because their languages are similar. Jesus is still at work.

And we hear from some of our missionaries that we have supported who had to leave their country, but yet they are still allowing other people from their neighboring country to go in and still share the gospel.

[11 : 51] And it's still going on. So first of all, we see that they were united in prayer. And then secondly, we see that they recognized God's sovereign power.

First thing they did when the apostles came back and said, they don't want to talk about Jesus. And they said, let's pray. They united in prayer. They prayed to God for more boldness.

And they recognized in their prayer who God was. They recognized that God could do it. They were praying to a God that had all the power. When you want something done, what do you do?

You go to the one that can change it, right? You know, a lot of times we complain about things. And, you know, we complain. We complain to other people who can't do anything about it.

What's the point of that? It doesn't accomplish anything other than it gets you both upset. It gets you both frustrated. So if you want something done, you go to the person that can do something about it.

[12 : 53] So what do they do? They go to God because God was the one that could do something about it. Lord, you made the heavens and the earth. They recognized God's sovereign power.

Verse 24, they went to God, Lord, you are God. You made the heaven and the earth. You made everything that is in the earth.

In their prayer, they acknowledged God's sovereignty. I want us to notice how they addressed God. What did they call him? Lord, you are God.

Now, there are a few different Greek words for Lord. There's kurios, Lord. Lord, but here in this verse, I want you to notice that they addressed God as sovereign Lord who is in control of all things.

The Greek word that they used when they talked to him is the Greek word from which we get our English word despot. You ever heard of the word despot?

[13 : 54] We hear that in other countries. What is a despot? A despot. It's a ruler who exercises absolute authority. It's a ruler whether it is benevolent or whether it's abusive.

It's someone who has absolute power. No one can confront them because otherwise they're going to find that it's useless because a despot exercises absolute power.

That's the word they used for God. God, you are in control of everything. You can change people's hearts and minds.

Was the crucifixion of Jesus a mistake? I've heard people say, you know, it was so sad that the Jews did that to Jesus.

Well, the Jews were the human mechanism that God used to accomplish what? His plan.

[14 : 59] God uses people to accomplish His purpose. What did God do with foreign rulers in the Old Testament? His people turned against Him. And what did He do?

He used foreign powers and I don't want to say like puppets on a string, but kind of, sort of, right? He would, God says, He can turn to the heart of a king.

He can make him do whatever He wants to. And so, when they said God, when they said the Greek word that they used for God at this point, they said, God, You are an absolute authority.

You can control things. So, we are not afraid of these guys because you are still in control. Now, it's good to know the person who created everything, right? God the Father who created the heavens and the earth is our heavenly Father.

We sang about Him this morning. He is our heavenly Father. They also approached Him as Creator, the Father who is the Lord of heaven, Lord of earth.

[16 : 04] And think about that. When we have the Creator of the heaven and the earth as our Father, what is there to fear? I mean, when you're growing up, you think your dad can do no wrong, right?

Especially if you had a father who was loving, had a father who was a strong leader in the home, and you're not afraid. Why? Because dad can fix it, dad can overcome it, and dad can take care of it.

Well, as humans, we have limitations. God is not human. He is all powerful, so he can take care of it. So who better to be in control and come to our rescue than the Creator of the universe?

And here's the thing, when they prayed, verse 24 through 26, why did the heathens rage and the people plot vain things?

What did they do? They quoted Psalm. They quoted Psalm chapter 2, Psalm 2, verses 1 and 2. The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and his Christ.

[17 : 18] This prayer was solidly based on the Word of God, Psalm 2, verses 1 and 2. And here's an interesting thing. The Word of God and prayer always go together.

The Word of God and prayer, because when we pray, how should we pray? Pray the will of God. How do we know the will of God? It's in his Word.

John 15, 7 says, If you abide in me, and my words abide in you. So, what did John say?

If you abide in me, my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. So, the Word of God and prayer go together.

What Psalm 2 was describing was the world rulers who were in opposition. It was a revolt of the nations against Christ and against the Messiah.

[18 : 20] So, what the early church did was, so what the church did was, they applied Psalm 2 to their present situation. They said, just like the psalmist wrote about the kingdoms of the earth revolting against God, these religious leaders are our opposition.

These are the ones that are trying to keep us from accomplishing God's will. But it was all a part of God's perfect plan. They realized, God, you are in control, so there was no need to fear.

So, there's a call to acknowledge God in all our circumstances. What are you going through? It may be physical opposition against the gospel.

It may be Satan's opposition in your family. It may be a financial issue going on. It may be a relationship issue that is going on in your life, in your family right now.

What do we do? We acknowledge God's sovereignty. We say, God, you are in control, and you can take care of this, just like the early church did. God, you're in charge.

[19 : 33] You are in control, and you are the only one that can do something about it. All too often, what we do is we try to fix things ourselves.

What happens when we do that? Very often, we fall flat on our face, and it didn't work like we planned. You know, the law of unintended consequences. So, pray to God, God, you take care of this.

Think about Corrie ten boom. Anyone remember the name Corrie ten boom? Back during the Nazi occupation, Corrie ten boom and her family were taken.

They ended up in concentration camps. The rest of Corrie ten boom's family were all killed. And what allowed her, what allowed Corrie to be able to come out of it, still trusting God, not only still trusting God, but in one of her meetings coming face to face with one of those leaders in the internment camp who treated her so horribly.

Come face to face with her and tell her who he was. Now, her first response was revulsion and hatred. But she said, if I believe in a good God, in a God who forgave me, she turned around and gave him a hug and said, I forgive you.

[21 : 07] How's that possible? Believing in a sovereign God who's in ultimate control of all of our circumstances. It was a faith that allowed her to forgive.

You may say, well, I don't see how she could have done that because I'll never forgive and you fill in the blank. If you believe in a sovereign God, here's the thing, if you believe in a God that could forgive you, I can believe in a God that can forgive anybody else.

God is in control. Next, what do we see? They asked for boldness. They didn't cower. They didn't walk away with their tails between their legs and go home.

What did they do? They prayed to God for boldness. Verse 27 through 29, for truly against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together to do whatever your hand and your purpose determined beforehand to be done.

Crucifixion wasn't an accident. It was in God's predetermined plan before the earth was formed that he knew that Adam would make that choice in the Garden of Eden, would rebel against him, would sin, and would choose personal choice wanting to know the difference between, he wanted to experience wrong, if you will, because Satan said, God doesn't want you to know the difference between good and bad.

[22 : 43] They didn't know bad up to that point. So God, in his predetermined plan, knew that Jesus Christ would have to die on the cross to be the substitution for us, would take away our sin, would be our redeemer, like was sung earlier this morning.

So it was God who understood your purpose determined before to be done, verse 28. Verse 29, Now, Lord, look on their threats and grant to your servants, grant to us, that with all boldness they may speak your word.

So as Peter and John are praying, as the church are united in their prayer together, they're praying for boldness so they could speak the word of God even more clearly.

The disciples didn't ask for safety. Isn't that interesting? The disciples didn't say, God, we want you to just break their teeth and keep them from having any authority over us.

And, you know, we just pray that you would keep us safe. They didn't pray for safety, they prayed for boldness. Because we accomplish so much more when we risk than when we pull back in safety.

[24 : 01] We accomplish so much more for God when we are willing to risk than if we pull back in safety and say, okay, God, still, I want the same result.

What did God do? How did every prophet that God had called do it? They went out in the face of opposition and they risked their life to do what God said.

What do missionaries do today who leave the safety of the relative safety of our own country and go into dangerous places around the world? They risk their family, they risk their lives because that's the way we accomplish great things for God.

So the early church said, no, we don't pray for safety. We pray, give us more boldness so we can go out and do it again even more boldly than we did before.

They didn't ask for protection, they asked for power. They didn't ask for protection, they asked for power. The early church strongly believed in God's sovereignty. They believed in his perfect timing.

[25 : 04] So if God's sovereign, and he was in control of everything and they believed in and he was in control of everything and they believed in his sovereignty, couldn't God give them the power to go out and make a difference in their world?

And we can do the same. It's when God's people get out of balance and maybe overemphasize one or the other. I know there are some who overemphasize God's sovereignty. God's in control, God will take care of it, I don't have to do anything.

Everyone that's going to be saved will be saved, God will take care of it, don't worry about it, I don't have to do anything. And there are others on the other hand that say, you know what, it all depends on us and we've got to get out there and if we don't do it, nobody's going to trust Christ.

Well, the fact of the matter is, God's going to do His part as we do our part. God's Holy Spirit prepares the hearts and the minds of people.

God's Holy Spirit convicts us of sin. God's Holy Spirit takes care of that and all we have to do is go out and tell. All we've got to do is go out and tell people about Jesus Christ.

[26 : 13] It's when God's people get out of balance or overemphasize sovereignty or responsibility that the church loses its power. And once again, I'm reminded of Augustine's wise words.

He said, and some of you probably have heard this before, pray as though everything depends on God and work as though everything depends on you. I've heard people say, well, God, just take care of it.

And we twiddle our thumbs and say, I hope it happens. No. Pray because God is in control and then go out and share the gospel. Go out and make, go out and be a peacemaker.

Go out and do whatever it is God has called us to do. Trust God, but do what God's called you to do. So faith in a sovereign Lord is a tremendous encouragement for God's people to step out in faith, keep serving and keep serving the Lord even when things get difficult.

So like the early disciples, we pray for boldness. God, give us the boldness to go out and reach our community. God, we pray for boldness so we can go out and just share the love of Jesus Christ with those around us despite opposition or threat.

[27 : 24] And last, what we notice is the power. We notice the power of their bold prayer. Verse 30, by stretching out your hand to heal and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

Their prayer concluded with a profound sign of God's approval. God approved of what they were praying. Their whole room shook. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and they continued to speak the word of God with all boldness.

Brothers and sisters, the power of the name of Jesus Christ hasn't lost, the name of Jesus Christ hasn't lost its power today. Jesus Christ still has the power to heal. Jesus Christ still has the power to save.

Our responsibility is simply to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ. But for many, they've lost their power because they've stopped praying to a sovereign God who is in control of everything.

[28 : 37] I don't know who said this. It's anonymous, but this is it. Nothing lies beyond the reach of prayer except that which lies beyond the will of God.

Nothing lies outside the reach of prayer except that which lies outside the will of God. Meaning if it's in the will of God, God can do it.

If it's outside of the will of God, why would God do it if it's outside of His will? Dr. R.A. Torrey, the great evangelist, said, pray for great things, expect great things, work for great things, but above all, pray.

So let me say that again. Pray for great things, expect great things, work for great things.

He says, but above all, pray. The early church prayed, God answered their prayer. But just as the early church did, as the early disciples did, we need to come together, be united in prayer.

[29 : 39] Because after all, what does God want accomplished? God wants, God wills that everyone come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior.

As a matter of fact, the angels in heaven rejoice when someone comes to trust Christ as their Savior, because that's what life is all about. Life is all about being in relationship with God.

See, I think that we've gotten things a little bit askew today, because we think it's all about making a good living. It's all about being comfortable. What's the purpose of life apart from God?

Because one day we'll breathe our final breath on this earth as a human being, and according to the Bible, according to God's Word, we're going to end up in one of two places. With God, or apart from God.

I, for one, want to be in the with God group, and that comes from knowing Jesus Christ as our Savior. But we need to get out of our bubble, not allow adversity, even if it's physical challenges, to keep us from sharing God's message.

[30 : 59] I want you to listen this morning to a fellow named Nick Vujovic. Since seeing you a couple years ago, I think it's been that, I have a photo of a really cool report, just fun.

This is Ukraine. This is the 17th of September, 2017. 800,000 people were there face to face. 400,000 gave their life to Jesus Christ that day.

And, um, the coolest thing was that we had 26 countries watching live without commercial breaks in 20 languages to 52.7 million people.

And so, the fact that God can use the foolish things of this world to confound the wise is so awesome. And God has opened up incredible doors for the ministry of our ministry called Life Without Limbs from California to just open up those doors that are normally not open.

And God opens up those doors and I get my little foot in there and kick them open. And, um, we were in Iran in August. I go to Dublin, Ireland tomorrow.

[32 : 14] Um, and I just thank you for your prayers and your love and support. And in praying for our country, I want to show you a very encouraging photo. This is the government of Ukraine.

This is the Senate, the House of Representatives, everyone but the president was there. If you notice closely, they're actually not sitting on their seats. They're on their knees. This was in April 2017 when I was able to address the government about faith and God and honoring God as nations.

And they asked for the forgiveness of sins on national live TV and asked God to heal their land in Ukraine. Isn't that awesome? Isn't that awesome?

Now, if you ever told me as a kid that God's going to use you to be the hands and feet of him and to stand in front of the gates of hell and redirect traffic, I would say you're crazy.

But he can do exceedingly abundantly more than we can ever ask, imagine, or attain. Amen? Amen? Amen. And in my 36 years of life, 21 years walking with the Lord, I feel like I've kind of finally hit a graduation, like a promotion kind of thing.

[33 : 31] And I feel like all the things that have brought us up until this point, whether you're ever on a stage, whether you ever have a title or not, everything that has led up to our life up until this moment, if God gives us tomorrow, everything that has ever happened can propel us for the things of tomorrow, good or bad.

But what I want to talk about is get out of the bubble. Everyone say bubble. Because his ways and thoughts are higher than ours.

What are we facing today? What are your challenges? Nick Vujicic, born without limbs, has spoken to more people than most evangelists because God has used his challenge to give him a platform so we could share the wonderful words of Jesus Christ.

What are we facing today? And what are we going to allow to get us off the track? I trust that we will be like the early church and say, God, I don't want this opposition.

I don't want this challenge. I don't want anything to keep me from moving forward, seeing people come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior, seeing their lives put back together, give them purpose, give them new life in Jesus Christ and see them grow and become, becoming who God wants them to be.

[35 : 06] What would the early church tell us as faith today? I believe they would say, go bold or go home. I believe they would say, go bold or go home.

What did they pray for? Not safety. They prayed for boldness. God, we know that we've heard their threats, but you made the heaven and the earth.

You control everything because you are the final authority. God, take what they said and give us boldness to go out and to share our faith for you.

They didn't go home with their tail between their legs, but I believe they would say, go bold because that's for which they prayed. More boldness to go out and expect more things from God.

Let's pray. Father, this morning as we've come together, we ask that your Holy Spirit would be in control. I ask heavenly father this morning that you would unite our hearts in the one mission you've left us with.

[36 : 17] And that is to make disciples. That is to be your ambassadors. That is to go out and to be your mouth.

To go out and to be your hands and your feet. As we would go out today and carry out the mission that we were left with by Jesus Christ.

To go out and to be my witnesses. Starting where you are. Going out from there. And then finally to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Father, we thank you. Give us boldness to accomplish your mission. No matter what. We pray. In Jesus name. Amen.