

Acts 4:23-33

²³After Peter and John were released, they went to their own friends and reported everything the high priests and the elders had said. ²⁴When they heard this, with one mind they raised their voices to God and said, “Master, you are the God who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵By the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David, your servant, you said:

Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?

²⁶The kings of the earth take their stand,
and the rulers are gathered together
against the Lord
and against his Anointed One.

²⁷“For certainly, in this city both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and people of Israel, were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸They did whatever your hand and your plan had decided beforehand should happen.

²⁹“Now Lord, look at their threats and give to your servants the ability to keep on speaking your word with all boldness ³⁰as you stretch out your hand to heal and as signs and wonders take place through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

³¹After they prayed, the place where they were gathered was shaken. Also, everyone was filled with the Holy Spirit, and they continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

³²The whole group of believers was one in heart and soul. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they held everything in common. ³³The apostles continued to testify about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ with great power, and abundant grace was on all of them.

Stand

I.

His gambit had paid off. In point of fact, he hadn't done any mental gymnastics to determine whether or not it *would* pay off before he had begun his diatribe. At the moment he had spoken, he really didn't care *what* would happen to him. It had been the good and right thing to say—it had been *necessary* to say it, come what may. But he had said it—he had taken his stand—and it had worked out.

The opposition *had* performed *their* mental gymnastics to try and come up with a verdict that would allow this dangerous man and his cohort to be taken off the streets. Try as they might, however, they couldn't come up with any charges they could make stick. All they could do is make some additional threats and release them.

Last week's First Lesson left us hanging a bit. We heard Peter launch with his rhetoric. We heard him accuse the ruling class leaders in the Sanhedrin of killing Jesus. We heard his bold proclamation: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, EHV). But we didn't hear what happened.

In the verses between last week's lesson and this week's, the Book of Acts tells us that

the Sanhedrin discussed the matter. “They asked, ‘What should we do with these men? To be sure, it is evident to all who live in Jerusalem that a miraculous sign has been done through them, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷However, in order that this may spread no further among the people, let us give them a strict warning not to speak any longer to anyone in this name” (Acts 4:16-17, EHV). Their conclusion was that they couldn’t really take any direct action at the time because of the obvious miracle Peter and John had performed of healing the man lame from birth. It was decided that, for the time being, the rulers wouldn’t take an obvious stand. All they would do is make a few more thinly veiled threats and send them on their way.

What would Peter and John do next? Would they listen to the threats and change their behavior? It has been said that discretion is the better part of valor. In other words, it is better to be careful than to do what is dangerous and unnecessary.

Was it dangerous and unnecessary to go on speaking the Name of Jesus? Was it dangerous and unnecessary to carry on in the way they had been doing? The threats made to them indicated that lives would be at stake. Not necessarily *just* the lives of those speaking out, either—the lives of those who were known associates might also expect to be threatened. There was a definite and decided temptation to shut it down.

II.

“After Peter and John were released, they went to their own friends and reported everything the high priests and the elders had said” (Acts 4:23, EHV). *Everyone* needed to know what they were up against. It would be inappropriate to leave anything out, because *all* the people associated with the fledgling Christian Church would face the same opposition.

This was a critical time for the whole church. From this time on, all the preaching and teaching about Jesus would be done in open violation of the law. Everything said by a known follower of Jesus could—and would—be used against them if there were any chance of making some kind of charge stick.

What would be the reaction? Would the apostles and the rest of the believers shrink back from the bold statement Peter had made before the Sanhedrin? Would they cave to the pressure? “When they heard this, with one mind they raised their voices to God” (Acts 4:24, EHV). Their first reaction was to pray.

Notice what was *not* in their prayers. They did *not* pray that God would punish the Sanhedrin. They did *not* pray that God would give them special protection or spare them from any further hardship as they proclaimed the message of the gospel. They did *not* even pray a prayer of thanksgiving that Peter and John had been released from prison.

“When they heard this, with one mind they raised their voices to God and said, ‘Master, you are the God who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them” (Acts 4:24, EHV). First they acknowledged God’s power.

“By the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David, your servant, you said: ‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers are gathered together against the Lord and against his Anointed One” (Acts 4:25-26, EHV). They quoted Scripture—Psalm 2—and recognize that *Jesus* is the One the Psalmist was pointing to. The kings of the earth and the rulers had taken *their* stand. It was against the Lord; it was against Jesus.

“For certainly, in this city both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and people of Israel, were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you

anointed. ²⁸They did whatever your hand and your plan had decided beforehand should happen” (Acts 4:27-28, EHV). Jesus had been the Anointed One—the Messiah long promised. He had fulfilled God’s plan of salvation for all people. There had been opposition—fierce opposition—but the plan had been completed.

Silencing voices. Deplatforming. Threats to one’s livelihood.
Some things never change.

III.

There is a God who simply won’t tolerate sin. Though sin runs rampant in the world, many have been led to believe that sin doesn’t matter—there are really no consequences, as long as current societal norms determine that you are part of the right side of history.

The news that there is a God who simply does not tolerate sin is not palatable. To hear that this same God made a plan to deal with the sins of all people is not logical. That this involved the painful and humiliating death of his One and only Son on a cross—an instrument of torturous execution—is ludicrous.

There has always been fierce opposition to that message. The world and all its voices take their stand against God and against his Anointed One.

What do you do? What *can* people do?

As did Peter and John and this early group of believers, start with prayer. The opening of their prayer recognized God’s power to accomplish salvation, as he had already done by sending Jesus. Pray that same way. Thank God for the salvation he has given to the world and to *you* specifically.

Continue your prayer the way these believers did: “Now Lord, look at their threats and give to your servants the ability to keep on speaking your word with all boldness” (Acts 4:29, EHV). Lord, you know the threats are there. We might *like* to have them removed, but Jesus told his disciples that we could *expect* persecution. Far more important, Lord, is that you give us boldness to speak *in spite* of threats.

The message is so important that it simply *must* continue to be brought to the world. It’s more important than politics. It’s more important than social pressures. It’s more important than loss of wealth or income. It’s more important than life itself. “Give to your servants the ability to keep on speaking your word with all boldness.”

“After they prayed, the place where they were gathered was shaken. Also, everyone was filled with the Holy Spirit, and they continued to speak the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31, EHV).

Sometimes God’s answers to prayers can’t be seen. Sometimes we have to go back to the Word of God yet again and study more so we can understand what God’s answers to our prayers are. Sometimes his answer to prayer is that we have to wait a while.

This time the answer came immediately. The building was shaken, and the Holy Spirit came on them with power. The fact that they continued to speak about Jesus boldly was evidence of God’s answer to their prayer.

IV.

“The whole group of believers was one in heart and soul” (Acts 4:32, EHV). Even after prayer has been answered, it takes resolve. It takes unity of doctrine and practice. Don’t just agree to disagree in certain areas. There must be unity in heart and soul about everything Jesus taught.

“The whole group of believers was one in heart and soul. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they held everything in common” (Acts 4:32, EHV). It is important to understand the second half of that passage in the immediate context of the first half of the passage. The Christian Church didn’t become a commune where everyone lives together on a compound. Power to redistribute wealth was not given to a government or to the church. The members didn’t immediately turn over all their property to the church. Rather, they recognized that everything they were and had was to be used for the common good of the message of the gospel.

After today’s text we learn: “From time to time those who were owners of lands or houses sold them, brought the proceeds received from what was sold, ³⁵and laid it at the apostles’ feet. It was distributed to each one according to what anyone needed” (Acts 4:34-35, EHV). Believers continued to own property and conduct business. As they were able and as they wished in their love for the preaching of the gospel and for their fellow believers, from time to time they would support those who were in need, much as we continue to do to this day.

Prayers for boldness continued to be answered. “The apostles continued to testify about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ with great power, and abundant grace was on all of them” (Acts 4:33, EHV).

Timid little Peter had already spoken boldly and accusingly to the Sanhedrin. When we celebrate Pentecost a few weeks from now, we will be reminded that it was that same formerly-timid Peter who would stand up and fearlessly deliver a powerful sermon which the Holy Spirit used to convert thousands to believe in Christ.

The message continues. The need for the message of the gospel continues. Take your stand. Pray that the message of the gospel might continue to be taught boldly in a critical world. Pray that the Lord would send workers into the harvest field to proclaim the Word. Pray that you would be a part of that work with your lips and your lives and your offerings.

Pray for God to send his Holy Spirit to equip us to continue to witness the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep. Amen.