

Well, good morning, how are we? Good, good! I want to give a quick shout-out to those of you who are joining us in the online community! It is good to get to dive into the Word with you, wherever you are at the moment.

If I haven't been able to meet you yet, my name is Doug; I'm one of the pastors here at Foothills. And this morning we're going to continue on in our series through the book of Acts. So, if you have a Bible with you, and I hope you do, go ahead and grab it, and if you would, open up with me to the book of Acts, chapter 4, that's where we'll begin.

If you remember, last week, Pastor Brian walked us through Peter and John's encounter with the religious leaders, the Sanhedrin, who were paid by Rome to keep control of the Jewish people. They got word that Peter and John were preaching about Jesus Christ and the fact that He has risen from the dead. There were two problems with this for the Sadducees. The first, they didn't believe in "resurrection," that is they didn't believe that Jesus could rise from the dead. Next, as Peter and John were sharing the gospel thousands had become followers of Jesus including one man in particular who had been crippled for 40 years and was now running around the city proclaiming the good news about Jesus. This totally caught the attention of, well everybody! And the religious leaders didn't appreciate it.

Could you imagine being Peter and John? They have been arrested and brought before the same institution that was responsible for the murder of Jesus and have been demanded to explain themselves, to explain by what name they had done this healing. They stood there before the chief priests, the Sadducees, the scribes, all the religious leaders that condemned and crucified Jesus for the same thing that they were just doing in the temple.

Could you imagine what they were feeling, what they were thinking? Not long ago they watched this same thing happen to their Rabbi, their friend, their Lord and Savior. Surely, if they can crucify Jesus we are done for. I can not imagine that this did not shake Peter and John to their core. I can't imagine that they slept that night.

I think so often we read these texts and we disassociate that these are real people experiencing real situations. There must have been some real level of fear of what they will experience, the pain, the concern for the future of the Christian people that they have been sharing the gospel with. Maybe Peter was fearing for his wife. Maybe regret? Maybe we should have done this differently? Not so loudly in the temple courts. Maybe there was a better way? These men must have had some sort of anxiety or stress. Imagine the way you feel when you see the cop behind you and they're tailgating you and then all of a sudden those lights go on! Ahh, so stressful. What Peter and John are experiencing is on a whole other level. Think about the weight on their shoulders of all those they're responsible for and now they may be dead in just a few hours. They now stand before the same court that was willing to release a murderer so that they could kill Jesus and His message. This is intense.

They are brought for the court and empowered by the Holy Spirit, they spoke boldly about Jesus. At the end of it all, they were told to cease and desist! The religious leaders said, "We can't deny that they have performed a miraculous sign, and everybody in Jerusalem knows about it." So! "They commanded them never again to speak or teach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:16-18)."

At this Peter and John had no choice but to stay, "we cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard (Acts 4:20)."

That's where we pick it up this morning in verse 23.

²³ When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

Could you imagine being in that house and Peter and John come flying through door and they're excited, they're saying, "you gotta hear this! Guys! Come here! You got hear what just happened!" And their friends are so relieved, that last they had heard or seen was Peter and John being arrested, surely they feared that would never see them again. And Peter and John start to tell them everything that happened. How terrified they were, but how they had been empowered, and what they said to the court, and how the court responded and threatened them to never speak the name of Jesus again. And Peter and John say, but, man, we told them!

"we cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard (Acts 4:20)."

And what is the response of all these Christians? They pray. Let's look at verse 24.

²⁴ And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, ²⁵ who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

" 'Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?

²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed'—

²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand

and your plan had predestined to take place. ²⁹ And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

What a prayer! They didn't pray, "Lord, protect us. Lord, give us a new quieter strategy that doesn't get as much attention. Lord, help us hide. No! Not even close! It's incredible.

Verse 24 says, they lifted their voices...now, super cool quick side note. When it says they lifted their voices, in the original language that word "voices" is actually in the singular. In other words, one voice spoke, but, all were in agreement with that one voice. So, all of them in agreement with what was being said was lifted to God. This is an example of group prayer and the significance of it. They were unified, as one person prayed they were all in agreement and encouraged by the prayer. Praying together out loud is a really good thing. And it may be new, or uncomfortable, or you don't know what to say, but trust me, it is powerful and it is worth stretching yourself to do.

There is **encouragement** in **praying** in **community**.

Okay, back to the text, with one voice they prayed and look at what their prayer is! Not, "hide us," but instead,

"Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them...

They immediately remind themselves and each other, they praise God that He is Sovereign, He is the ruler of all of that is created, all men, the heavens and the earth.

And then they quote Psalm 2...

²⁵ who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

“ ‘Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?

²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed’—

Now there is a reason that they quote Psalm 2. And just like any verse we read it's very important that we understand the context of what is happening. In Psalm 2 David is talking about the hostility of evil men, rulers, who were against God and wanted to serve themselves. Many of Jesus' followers were Jews and would not have forgotten the numerous times throughout history that the kingdom of men would often make futile attempts to defy, to go against God and His kingdom. But, every time, God's Kingdom would prevail.

The **kingdom of men** will **never prevail** against the **will of God**.

These disciples knew that. They lifted their voices to God and said, We know who You are! We know that you alone are in control. That You alone are everlasting and Sovereign. Friends, I have to assume that they were praying this not just from a posture of humility, proclaiming, we are aware that it was not our speech before the court, it was not our good looks, it was not because of anything we have done that they released us. But, instead, it is because of who You are! You are in control of men, of kingdoms. But, I also think there was some reminding going on. They spoke this out loud to remind themselves of who their God is. This is our God! He is not afraid of men who can only harm the body, but You are

God! You control everything including eternity. They knew that the kingdom of men will never prevail against the will of God.

They continue in verse 27,

²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your plan had predestined to take place.

This verse is remarkable, as it reveals to us that the followers of Jesus recognize that it was not just the Jews who had Jesus killed. I have heard people “blame” the Jews for killing Jesus. It was far more than that. It was a Jewish king, Herod, a Roman governor, Pontious Pilate, some Gentiles, some Jews, and the religious leaders, but most of all, this prayer shows us that it was all in accordance with God’s divine plan that He had predestined to take place. There was a recognition that just as God has predestined Jesus to be sacrificed, there’s a good chance that this is in God’s plan for them as well.

But, these disciples were saying to God that they are aware that He is the One in control and with a plan. That as terrifying as it is to stand before the court and give an account, to be threatened not to speak about Jesus, they are completely aware that it is God’s plan, that He has predestined, that will be done. This teaches us that...

Followers of Jesus trust the **plans of God.**

What does that mean then? Should we just take a back seat? Do we need to not be so bold? Do we need to not talk about Jesus? Just let God do

His thing? NO! They knew that they were God's thing! Check out verse 29,

29 And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness,

Isn't that something? They don't say, "And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants protection...safety, a place to hide! freedom from persecution, pain, suffering." NO! The one thing that these men are concerned about, more than anything else, it's not self preservation, but they are concerned they will grow weak at their knees and fall silent and that they'll no longer preach the Word.

They get into a room with all these other believers and their primary concern is that they have the courage, the boldness to continue to speak with all conviction about Jesus and the Kingdom of God! They want to continue to live for Jesus in a way that will provoke people to repent of their sins and to persuade those who were once sinners to come and receive, not only forgiveness, but salvation that gives them an eternal security that allows them to be in the presence of God in the Kingdom of Heaven. Church, hear this,

Our **lives** are to **persuade** others **to Christ**.

This is their request to God! Give us boldness. Give us boldness to persuade others. God, look at their threats, look at the fear we're feeling and give us more courage. We want more courage to preach Your gospel!

It is absolutely incredible to me that these men had stood before the entire court of religious leaders who could cause them immense pain and harm, who had threatened them with repercussions that they would receive if they didn't stop talking about Jesus. It is incredible to me that after hearing all of that they said, "we cannot help but talk about Jesus."

Not only is incredible, but it's convicting. How often have we been in a place where our lives are in imminent danger for Jesus? How many of us can say that truly the power that can take away life came to me and said, if you don't stop speaking about Jesus and living for Jesus, you will die?

Friends, we need boldness and courage. We need boldness and courage when we are at work to talk about Jesus. When we are at school, we need boldness and courage to talk about Jesus. To talk about repentance, to urge people to turn from their sins and embrace forgiveness and salvation through Jesus.

The same Holy Spirit that filled Peter, John, and all of the disciples is the same Holy Spirit that you and I are indwelt by. You and I have the same power at work in us. You and I need to adopt this prayer. We need to make this our own prayer. That we would be people who speak with courage and boldness about Jesus, about who Jesus is and who we are because of Him.

Look at the result of their prayer in verse 31.

³¹ And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

I love God's response here. He's going, you think you were shook in that jail cell? You think you were shook when you stood before the court, let me remind you who can shake things up! "The place in which they were gathered together was shaken!" Now that is terrifying! But terrifying in an incredibly comforting and affirming way! When God is for you who can be against you!?

They were again, filled with the Holy Spirit and continued, not on their own power, but on the power of the Holy Spirit, they continued to speak the Word of God with boldness. Absolutely incredible.

Friends, you and I have been saved by Jesus. You and I are new creations. You and I have been charged with the responsibility to GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES. To preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not ashamedly. Not cowardly. Not creatively and carefully, and without ruffling feathers, or worrying about whether we'll be fired, or lose a friend. But boldly! Offering our lives as living sacrifices.

There is an awareness of the urgency of people coming to know Jesus. And so the followers of Jesus plead for courage, boldness to tell everyone the truth.

Recently I was listening to Martin Luther King Jr gave a speech about war. And in it he said something that shook me. That caused me to think. He quoted Dante and said,

"The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in a period of moral crisis maintain their neutrality. There comes a time when silence is betrayal."

Upon hearing his words about neutrality and silence I thought about the gospel and how often I have held back proclaiming truth as to avoid confrontation. I kept silent so as not to offend or upset. In the face of loud voices and pressure I have failed to be bold.

We are living in a moral crisis. Everywhere I look depravity is become more and more accepted and affirmed as “your truth” or “your reality.”

Friends,

Silence is betrayal.

Jesus has saved us. He has chosen us. He calls us His royal priesthood. We are to serve Him, represent Him, and bring Him honor and glory. He has entrusted His good news about forgiveness and salvation, not that we would remain neutral to save face, but that others would come to know Jesus and be saved!

Friends, let us pray these types of prayers. Let us live with this boldness and courage that just one might be saved! May we be shook and filled as these incredible examples were.