

When the Church Prays

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Summer of Seeking / Prayer / Acts 4:23–31

When the Church prays, something powerful happens. When the people of God gather together and set their minds and hearts to pray, God moves in powerful ways.

One of my favourite stories in the history of our church is how we came to be at this corner of Queen and Dixie.

Most of you know that Bramalea Baptist started in a school but soon started to outgrow it's space and they needed a new building. And God laid it on Pastor Stu Silvester's heart to petition the city for this land, at this corner, which at that time was an empty field. And for whatever reason, I'm not sure of the details, the city didn't want to grant this space to the church, they had a hard time getting this property.

And so, Bill Wright who we know just celebrated his 100th birthday went to Pastor Stu and said, you know we ought to head over to that corner, that property and march around it as a church and pray that God would give us that land.

And that's what they did, Sunday morning after church about 150 people or so came over to this property and they marched around the perimeter like Israel marched around the city of Jericho, praying as a church that God would give them this land.

And the next morning Pastor Stu got a call from the city and they said, you know we don't know what happened, but for some reason all your paperwork went through, that property will be yours.

When the Church prays together, something powerful happens.

It's what we see in our passage this morning. The Church in Acts, facing a crosspoint of their own, their first brush with political persecution, they come together not for a business meeting, but they gather to comfort each other and they gather to pray.

And we see the same thing that when the Church prays together something powerful happens.

When the Church prays, we see more clearly, we stand more boldly, and God moves powerfully.

Look with me at our passage this morning.

As we read our verses this morning, we're stepping into a bit of a tense situation for this church.

We get that sense because of how the passage starts; it tells us in verse 23.

Acts 4:23 ESV

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

A lot has happened in the past two chapters since Peter first preached the gospel and three thousand souls were added to the church.

Soon after that Peter and John are heading to the temple where they encounter a man who cannot walk, begging for money. And Peter says to him, listen I don't have any money to give you, but I've got something better, I've got the salvation of Jesus Christ and to show you the power of Jesus, let me heal you in Jesus' name. And this man starts walking.

Well, naturally people start gathering around to see and Peter and John begin to share the gospel, and the promise of the forgiveness of sins and restoration to God, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and guess what - 5000 people come to salvation that day. This Church is spreading like crazy.

But the religious leaders will have none of this. It's causing a commotion, causing a disturbance and so they arrest Peter and John, and they tell them under threat of violence do not preach or heal in the name of Jesus any longer. Or else, there will be consequences.

But Peter and John are bold... and they say we must obey God rather than man; we must keep preaching the name of Christ because we are compelled by the God who saved us.

They're released but are now under the watchful eye of the religious leaders. What do they do?

They're whole ministry, the whole movement is based on spreading the good news, the message that Jesus Christ forgives sin. And God is moving, God is working, in just a short time 8000 people have come to salvation. They have to, they must continue to preach, but it is clear that if they do, they will be facing major opposition.

What do you do when you face a major dilemma? Where do you go? What's your move when you're at a crossroad and you have a major decision to make, when you're facing opposition in life?

Maybe you call some friends or family, maybe you seek out council, or maybe you pull up a little ChatGPT to see what it has to say?

Let me ask you, is prayer a part of that process at all? Is prayer the first thing you do? Pressure has a way of revealing what's really in our hearts, doesn't it? The places you go, the people and things you turn to when the pressure is up reveal where your hope truly is.

Maybe it's not in places of counsel. Maybe it's an escape you look for, something to numb the mind, some temptation that you give in to.

But what about us as a church? What do we do in times of crisis or times of opposition, where is our hope? Where do we look? Like maybe we need to have a board meeting, maybe. An emergency member meeting again maybe...

But more than another meeting, more than another strategy session, here's where we need to turn in times of opposition. We need to turn to the Lord in prayer.

I love the example set out for us in this chapter. Notice that when Peter and John left, they knew right where they could turn, they had a safe place to go in their church family.

Notice it says when they were released, they went to their friends... I love that. here's what we know, that by this point in the first church, the people that made up the church were more than just people they worshipped with, they were a community.

The end of chapter 2 tells us that this group, this community were not just devoted to the teaching of the apostles, but they were breaking bread in each others homes. They would go to the temple for worship together, they would share meals together, they would share their possessions together, they did life and worshipped and served together.

I love that image because it tells us that church is so much more than just a building we go to, the church is a community. And what makes us a community isn't just that we share a space of worship on Sunday, what makes us a community is that there is a friendship, a unity, a sense of family that binds us together.

Church is so much more than just a place you show up once a week. Church is a place you belong to, that you're a part of; a place where you go to give just as much as a place you go to receive.

There wasn't a doubt in their minds where they could turn to in their time of need, they went right to their community.

And I get it, we are a large church, I doubt you're going to be friends with everyone here, but remember how large this church was, we know of at least

8000 people that were apart of this church, I doubt all of them were gathered together.

But there was a group of believers, a group of friends within that church that Peter and John knew they could go to in their time of need.

Folks this is what church is, it's what we try to do here at BBC, to let you know that church is so much more than just what happens here on Sunday, we love to gather on Sunday, but we're also called to grow together in community. To give of ourselves and our resources to the work of the Church and go and be witnesses in the community.

This is a community, not just a gathering place.

Peter and John knew right where to go in their time of need, they knew they go to their church family. And notice what their church friends and family does for them.

They don't just offer wise words of advice, or encouragement, although I'm sure they did that. They knew that what they had to do in this moment was pray.

This church, this community, gathered together and prayed in their time of need and something powerful happens.

First, when the Church prays we see clearly...

WE SEE CLEARLY

When the Church prays, prayer has a way of giving us eyes to see clearly, of removing blinders, aligning our hearts and helping us see clearly.

Look at how this church started their prayer in verse 24.

Acts 4:24 ESV

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."***

I love the imagery that is here, when they heard the report from Peter and John it says they lifted their voices together to God... in the original language it simply means they lifted their voices in unison, in one accord.

This isn't people praying isolated prayers next to each other, this is corporate prayer, calling out in one accord together in one voice.

And notice where their prayer starts, their prayer starts with proclamation about who God is, ***the Sovereign Lord who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and everything in them.***

Let me ask you, are you starting to see a pattern to prayer in the Scriptures? Those of you who have been with us since week one, do you notice where prayer always starts in the bible? It starts with proclaiming who God is, it starts with adoration, it starts with reminding our hearts who it is that we are calling on, who it is that we are standing before.

And again this church is specific. They are calling on the Sovereign Lord, literally in the original language, the master, the one with absolute authority, the owner and ruler of everything. The one who made the heavens and the earth, the one who made the sea.

It's not just a tone of worship it's a reminder, that whatever is going on right now, whatever I am facing, whatever opposition there might be, God you are greater. It is not outside of your control, your authority, your rule.

We need to be reminded, don't we? As we go into prayer and we are bringing big issues before God, we need to be reminded in the face of big issues that our God is bigger. Our God is greater. Don't just tell God about how big your problems are, be reminded of how big your God is.

Is that how our prayers start? When we're facing pressure, when life is hard, when opposition is real. Do we rush in and just start listing off everything or do we start with reminding our hearts, reminding our souls of how great and

awesome our God is, that He rules with absolute authority over every aspect of life.

See, we start our prayers this way, proclaiming the greatness of God because what it does right away is it puts things in proper perspective, doesn't it?

When we learn to take our eyes off our problems and look toward our God, things in life are put in proper perspective.

Like sometimes we're so overwhelmed with the obstacle that we are facing that it's all we can think about, all we can talk about and when it's at that level, it makes situations seem overwhelming.

And we rush into prayer, we don't step back, we just rush in and tell God all about it, the more we talk about it, the bigger it becomes.

Sometimes we need to just step back and be reminded who God is, reminded that we serve the absolute master and creator and owner of everything.

It's like having a camera zoomed in on an object that makes it look so large, but sometimes we need to zoom out and see the whole picture, see things in their proper perspective; that's what this does.

Prayer helps us see clearly, who God is clearly, what His Word says clearly.

I love how this church in Acts starts with the truth of who God is and they move to the truth of what God's Word says.

Their prayer on how great and powerful their God is, reminds them of the truth of what God's Word says, they quote directly from [Psalm 2](#).

We see it there in verse 25 and 26.

Acts 4:25-26 ESV

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? The kings of***

the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed.”

In essence, they say, Lord we aren't surprised by the opposition to you and your Son. This is what you said would happen, that the people would plot against, but they'd plot in vain; the kings and rulers would set themselves against you and against your anointed, but their plans would be frustrated.

Do you see what they're doing? They're being reminded not just of who God is, but what His Word proclaims.

Again we see that prayer and the Word go together, hand in hand. It's this step back to see things from proper perspective.

Lord, we're facing opposition to the ministry here, we're facing persecution. These people and these leaders have set themselves against you, but God you are sovereign and great, and your Word tells us that this would happen, it's not a surprise to you, and it shouldn't be a surprise to us.

But I love the next section of [Psalm 2](#), that isn't quoted in Acts, because it paints such a powerful image for us.

The church is quoting [Psalm 2:1-3](#) why do the nations rage and the people plot in vain, the rulers set themselves against God and His anointed.

But verse 4 says the ***He who sits in the heavens laughs... the Lord holds them in derision.***

It's worthwhile just to park on that image, people in the world, nations gathering together to go against the Lord, and on earth it seems like chaos and evil are breaking forth and then we get this scene in heaven, ***He who sits in the heavens...*** the world is going crazy and God is seated. He's not on the edge of His seat in anticipation, He's not standing looking down in concern, He's sitting there and He's laughing.

Foolish people, do they really think all of this will amount to anything? The part – He holds them in derision... it's kind of like wrestling with a little child who is swinging with all their might and you're just holding them off with one arm.

This is what the Word does, this is what prayer to the sovereign Lord does, it puts things in perspective for us. Chaos and evil are breaking forth, it seems like all hell is breaking loose on earth, you and I are panicking and worried and yet God is in the heavens, seated, laughing, and shaking His head, holding them off with no effort.

When the Church prays, He helps us see clearly, see God clearly, see the Word clearly, see how it is that God works.

See here's what they know, that if God is absolutely sovereign, that if He is the absolute ruler and authority, then all things are under His control, even the darkness and opposition of life.

Maybe that troubles you this morning, but understood correctly, it is a great source of comfort. Because it means that if God is in control even over the darkness, even over the evil, then God can take even the darkness and the evil we face and use it for our good and His glory.

That's what this church reflects on, they say this is how you worked in the events of your Son.

Acts 4:27–28 ESV

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 is nothing new, they're saying. This opposition, this darkness, this evil that we are facing — this is exactly what Jesus faced. He had Herod and Pontius Pilate and the whole Roman empire against Him.

Was there ever a darker day than the day when mankind murdered God's Son? Was evil ever on greater display than when God came to the earth in the form of a man, and people gathered together to conspire to put Him to death?

And yet look at what they pray. Verse 28. ***They did whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.***

Do you see it? This is [Psalm 2](#) happening in real time. The nations raged. The kings of the earth gathered together and plotted — and they plotted in vain. They thought they were destroying the Son of God. What they didn't know is that they were fulfilling the exact plan of God.

This does not mean that God created evil. It does not mean that God is the author of evil. But it does mean that God can take the evil deeds of mankind and use them to accomplish His eternal purpose.

And that is exactly what we see at the cross. The greatest evil ever committed became the greatest display of the glory and the power of God. They plotted to kill Jesus — and God took their evil and used it to accomplish salvation, forgiveness, redemption, restoration for you and me and for all who believe. The cross!

This is why the sovereignty of God is not a threat — it is a comfort. Because if God can take the murder of His own Son and turn it into your salvation, then there is nothing you are facing that He cannot take and use for your good and for His glory.

And that confidence is what cleared their sight. The threat in front of them didn't shrink. Herod was still Herod. That council still had every bit of the power they had the day before. But now this church could see it for what it was — real, but not ultimate. Dangerous, but never outside the hand of God.

And that's the reassurance for you and I and for this church this morning. As we bring our petitions to the Lord — our heartache, our failures, the opposition we

face, the evil we face — we can pray like this church prayed. Because God is in control. He is on His throne.

Romans 8:28 ESV

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

All things. Even this.

When the Church prays, we see clearly, don't we? We see God clearly, we see His Word clearly, we see His work clearly.

But we don't just need perspective. We need strength for today. We need courage and boldness.

And that's exactly what this church prays for next.

They pray and ask God for boldness.

Here's what else we gain when the Church prays. When the church prays, we stand boldly.

WE STAND BOLDLY

Acts 4:29–30 ESV

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.

You know, I'm amazed by this. I really am. Think about this for a second. This church is facing the threat of persecution, of violence, of shame, maybe even execution. These are the same men who killed Jesus.

And their prayer is: Lord, help us be bold in the face of it.

Do you catch what they're *not* praying? This church isn't praying for protection. They aren't asking God to remove them, or shelter them, or save them from it. They never once ask for the threat to go away.

No — Lord, help us to be more bold. Help us to continue the work. Make us courageous in our proclamation of Jesus.

I gotta be honest with you. I'm not sure that would be my prayer. My prayer sounds a lot more like, please Lord make it stop. Shield me from this harm. Do away with them. Make it so I don't have to face this at all — could you do that for me?

And I wonder if that's because one of the greatest idols of our culture is the idol of comfort. We love comfort. We build our lives around it. And the moment that comfort gets disturbed or disrupted, we don't know how to handle it — so the first prayer out of our mouths is always, Lord, get me out.

I've been struck by this even in the privilege I've had to travel and worship with churches in parts of the world living under real persecution. Because their prayers sound like this church's prayers.

You know, when we pray for the persecuted church, our prayers usually sound like this: protect them, Lord. Change the hearts of those government leaders so they can worship freely and openly — like us. Keep them from harm.

And those are good prayers. Those are powerful prayers.

But when I've sat and prayed *with* brothers and sisters who are actually living it, their prayers sound different. Lord, help us to be bold for you. Help us to be courageous. Don't let what our leaders are doing hinder the gospel — let the gospel keep spreading.

Maybe it's because those churches understand something we've forgotten. That opposition is just the natural response to the spread of the gospel. If the gospel is advancing, it's the kingdom of light taking ground from the kingdom of darkness — and surely that is going to cause conflict.

If they hated and persecuted Jesus, and they hated and persecuted the first church, then there is going to be opposition in our day too. Conflict is unavoidable if you're going to be on mission for Jesus.

So they don't pray for the problems to go away, they pray for boldness and courage to face it.

Maybe they pray like this because they realize something we often forget. That God so often does His deepest work in us not when life is easy, but in the hard seasons — in opposition, in pain, in the dark.

So our prayer isn't Lord, deliver us. Our prayer is Lord, make us bold. Let your work go forward. Let your Kingdom advance even in the face of opposition. May your gospel spread far and wide and may the Word of Jesus be fulfilled — that He will build His church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

When the church prays, we stand boldly.

But here's what really matters, here's where prayer makes the difference.

That when the Church prays, God moves powerfully.

GOD MOVES POWERFULLY

The first two points are about what prayer does in us, this is about how God works when we pray.

When the Church prays, God moves powerfully.

We read that first part of verse 31.

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken...

God wanted them to know He heard them, and so He moves in a tangible way. Don't think the power was in their prayer, the power came from the one they were praying to, God moved in a powerful way so that they could know, He hears us, He's with us.

This is so reassuring, that when we pray, we don't pray to a distant deity that is detached from our reality or situation, no, we pray to a God who is there, a God who answers when we call. A God who moves when we seek Him.

You say, well I've never felt the room move when I have prayed, but understand how rare this was, like this is the only time in all of Acts something like this happens, but the answer to the prayer wasn't the room shaking, the room shaking was the sign that God heard them.

It's like the mountain shaking at Sinai when God came down, it was Him telling them, reassuring them I'm right here with you. And I've never felt the room shake but I've had the assurance of God's presence.

Sometimes it's the chance encounter the next day, the sermon I heard that spoke right to my situation, it's a passage of Scripture I'm reading that speaks, the worship song that moved me to tears, the reassuring word from someone close at just the right time.

No, its not the prayer answered, it's God saying I'm here, I'm with you, we'll get through this.

It's not about the room shaking, it's about God's presence with them as they prayed.

Prayer isn't always about feeling something, sometimes we feel nothing, but that doesn't mean God hasn't moved powerfully.

We see the second part of that verse where God answers that prayer.

Acts 4:31 **ESV**

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.***

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the Word of God with boldness.

God answers their prayer, they prayed for boldness, He moved in boldness.

Notice the wording here carefully. They were filled with the Holy Spirit; notice it doesn't say they were indwelt by the Holy Spirit. There's a difference.

When we first come to faith in Jesus, the moment we place our faith and trust in Jesus we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit, meaning that Holy Spirit, God's very presence comes and lives in us, He makes His home in us.

That happens once and it never needs to happen again.

But the filling of the Holy Spirit is not just a one-time event. There are times, seasons in our lives where we are more filled with the Holy Spirit than others. Times and seasons where God moves more powerfully through us than other, times where we sense God presence, His closeness, His power in our lives more than others.

And it's more than just an emotion, it's not you getting goosebumps, but it's times when God uses us, uses our church, uses our ministry powerfully for His purpose.

Times of being filled with the Holy Spirit when His presence is undeniable. It's not about atmosphere; it's about God's power and glory moving through us.

When God's people pray, God moves powerfully.

So what does this look like, when God's people pray, when the Church prays and when God moves powerfully?

He moves powerfully so that a church begins to see people who never wanted anything to do with Jesus or His Church suddenly giving their lives over to Him, it looks like loved ones coming to the Lord, baptism tanks being filled, it looks like resources and needs that were out of reach suddenly being met, it looks like families that were broken, marriages that were falling apart suddenly being healed, it looks addictions being broken, lives being restored.

It looks God restoring vision and direction and purpose to ministries, the Word of God being central to all we do, it looks like people not just showing up on Sunday, but growing in their faith, serving side by side in ministry, it looks like God using the church not just on Sunday but everyday in our home, our neighbourhoods our communities, it looks like our church not just having an impact here, but impacting all of Brampton all of Canada for the gospel.

When the church prays God moves powerfully.

We believe this at BBC; it's why we are committed to making prayer a priority.

You know, I'll remind you that our elders meet every Sunday morning before service to pray in the prayer room and anyone is welcome to join. We have a Zoom prayer meeting every Wednesday, you'll hear of evenings of prayer and worship that we come together as a church family and just seek the Lord in prayer. Our prayer team has started prayer walks, just walking around neighbourhoods praying for the houses and people, they would love to have you join them. Every Sunday we have our prayer team down front after service, and they would love to pray with you.

When the church prays something powerful happens.

I want to take you back all those years ago when those 150 people or so walked this perimeter, praying for this land, that this building sits today.

I want us to realize that all those people weren't praying for themselves, they were praying for a land that would hold a building that maybe some of them would never sit in. I mean they couldn't have envisioned all those years ago that God would do something like this, fill this church like this.

All of us sitting here this morning are an answer, a fulfillment to those prayers that were prayed all those years ago.

Powerfully.

And the same God who moved powerfully back in Acts, the same God who moved powerfully to answer the prayer 40 plus years ago, is the same God who hears our prayers today.

When the church prays, we see more clearly, we stand more boldly, and God moves powerfully.