

Acts 4:23-31
CBBC
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Introduction—You can't understand the book of Acts or even the identity of a believer unless you understand that Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8 are now part of our spiritual DNA. We can't separate the gift of salvation, of eternally knowing our Father, of being with Christ; we can't separate that from being disciples of Christ. To not be constantly considering evangelism is to deny part of who God saved us to be. We have to consider many things, the content of the Gospel itself..., the conversation... there are a lot of books. Our audience.

God calls believers to disciple a hostile world. 23-27. . But we have a problem that we see illustrated here. The apostles were commanded to never connect Jesus with their miracles. They did not deny the miracles. They couldn't. But they refused to believe that the miracles came from Christ. So they charged the disciples to deny it also. Yes, there are miracles. Yes, they came from God, but they are never to say that they came from Christ. It is because they hated God, so they hated Christ. Jesus had warned them about this back in John 15. They saw it with the crucifixion of their Savior. Now, even in the midst of their miracles, of irrefutable proof that Jesus is alive, they still deny it.

We also see this hostility in the midst of their prayer. They quote from Psalm 2, which is a messianic psalm. It prophesies about the coming Messiah. The Gentiles rage against the Messianic king. The people rage against the Messiah. They hate Him. They deny His authority, his rule. We also find the term "Kiss the Son lest He be angry." There is an irrational element to sin because sin is based on an irrational hatred of one's Creator, or anyone who looks like the Creator. Jesus, the Messiah, is the image of the one true God. This is the reason why Peter and the other Christians are praying, because God knew from eternity past how much everyone would hate Jesus and would

hate Christians. They understand that they have been thrown into the lion's den, and they are supposed to preach the good news of the Gospel to the lions.

That same hostility exists today. It is more civilized. It is sleek and shiny and has all sorts of technology, but its heart beats with malice towards its creator. It is built into the world system, and it is supervised by Satan Himself. Let us not mistake morality for Christlikeness. Believers are called to Christ-likeness, not morality. Morality is overall good for a nation and its people. It is. God blesses it on certain levels. It helps things run better. The people are happier. But at the center of that morality is a rejection of Christ. I can be good without God changing me. Morality is almost worse than immorality in the sense that it teaches people that they can earn their way to God.

Nothing can hold that hostility back in the long run. I know the Constitution promises freedom of religion, but sooner or later, that will become irrelevant. Politics and philosophy burn to pieces in the flame of hatred against God. We have to be aware of that hostility and understand that, regardless of the hostility of our audience, we are expected to proclaim the truth of the Gospel to people who hate our God, and by extension will eventually hate us. Don't be surprised by that. When we go to a hostile group and proclaim a distasteful message, what are the results going to be? Being ignored is the best we can hope for many times. In some places, you lose your friends. In some places, you lose your job or your family. In some places, you lose your life.

What happens is that we wait to tell the Gospel to someone until we are sure they are not going to be irritated or frustrated with us. We don't want that hostility so bad that we wait for a perfect moment. That is not God's expectation. God expects us to be the one who breaks the ice. Take advantage of the opportunities when people come to

us, but the majority of what we should be doing is approaching others. We are not wired for that. We hate confrontation. We hate awkwardness. We are cowardly. We will be held accountable for our cowardice. So what can we do?

God has the power to make us bold in a hostile world. (28-30)

Consider first the fact that they went to prayer before anything else. I appreciate one author saying that “prayer is the participation in the final victory of the Kingdom of Christ.” They went to God first in this situation. It was not a throw-off prayer, or a matter of a brief prayer as we drive our car, but rather it was a carefully considered prayer with the community of believers together in one place. Because they knew that they needed to go to their Lord.

He has the power to change our hearts and to shape us in a way that we don’t think is possible. Peter and the other Christians knew that. They have acknowledged the hostility of the religious leaders. He tells God this in His prayer. The Gentiles are against us, and the people of Israel are against us. But God’s power was demonstrated in the crucifixion of Christ. They only did what God had predestined them to do. (verse 28). Acts 2:23 says the same thing. The fact that Jesus was crucified showed God’s power and plan. Yet, at the same time, the leadership will be held responsible for that death. (two points that are true—God’s presence, salvation—God ordains, and calls out “whosoever will.” Both are true in a way that I cannot understand. It demonstrates the limitless nature of God’s power. We know you have the power; you’ve shown us the depth and scope of God’s power over His creation.

What does he say in verses 30 and 31? Lord, be aware of their threats, and give us boldness while you, Lord, work through miracles. It is never wrong to pray for

deliverance. It is not wrong to pray for God to work in the other person's heart. We see that over and over. But, how much do we pray that God changes our hearts to make us obedient, regardless of the other person, or regardless of the consequences? Because that is what Peter prays. May we continue to do what we were commanded to do, give us boldness so that we are willing to proclaim Christ regardless of the consequences.

Boldness is the willingness to take risks. It is to act confidently or courageously. It is not a natural part of our personality to be bold. It is incredibly difficult to be bold when you know the consequences of that boldness. Peter has prayed his way through this, though. He has acknowledged God's authority and power. He knows that God has the ability to change his heart. He also knows that just because he was bold earlier does not mean that he will be bold the next time. So the believers go to their Creator, their Lord, to ask for boldness. They connect that with the healing and the signs and wonders that God has already done through the name of Jesus. They believe that God is capable of doing that.

We limit our prayers to our understanding of our personality. We only pray so far as we can comprehend our hearts. We don't let God's authority, power, and testimony shape what we pray for. God is capable of changing us in ways that we can't comprehend. Peter doesn't know it now, really, I think, but that is something the Holy Spirit is sent to us to do. Paul brings it up in Galatians 5, the fruits of the Spirit. Think about, first of all, how helpless we feel when we are told to have these qualities, but then God says that the Holy Spirit can make that part of who we are? Btw, let us not mistake natural personality traits with God-given fruits. People tell me that I am already bold. You don't need to pursue boldness, Garry, you already are. No, I can be

obnoxious. That is not the same thing. God given boldness is different than arrogantly giving your opinion on something. Our God is capable and wants us to pray for what we need to change.

God does what He promises. (verse 31) And when they had prayed, the place was shaken. The Spirit fills them, or responds to their prayer, and makes them bold. This is miraculous. “Pentecost was not only a past event, but a continuing reality. Pentecost can never be repeated, but it is also never retractable.” Now, I believe God shook the building and made them aware of what was happening because He wanted to reassure them that He was going to answer this prayer. He gave miracles to accompany the revelation. Yes, God does do this. And those people continued to speak the word of God with boldness. They walked back into a world that was hostile to them and proclaimed Christ regardless of the consequences.

I don’t know if you remember us going through Matthew 7:7-11, where Christ stated that He would give us anything we asked for. We see other places in Scripture where it is stated that if we ask for anything in His name, He will give it to us. There was the phrase, “We have the spiritual life we pray for.” If I may add some nuance to that, a corollary, “We are the evangelist we pray to be.” Our ability to give the Gospel is independent of our personality and preference; it is always based on prayer.

I think we are scared of praying for that type of boldness because we know how life-changing that could be, and that scares us.