

WHEN YOU PRAY
Shaken
Acts 4:23-31

We have been talking about the meaning and the importance of PRAYER over the last 3 weeks. Last week, we learned about PERSISTENCE in prayer. **P.U.S.H.** That was so powerful. Today, I want us to focus on the VALUE of CORPORATE PRAYER. Corporate prayer refers to the fact that we as believers and as a LOCAL CHURCH need to start praying TOGETHER! The Bible makes it clear that we can do far more TOGETHER than we could ever do INDIVIDUALLY. This is why Jesus said in

Matthew 18:18-20 NIV

18 "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again, truly I tell you that if **two of you** on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For **where two or three** gather in my name, there am I with them."

Something special happens when we pray TOGETHER. This was a SPIRITUAL principle that was even true in PHYSICAL warfare: **Leviticus 26:8 NIV**
 8 Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you.

Now, when it comes to corporate prayer, the EARLY church has my attention. When I read the book of Acts, I am convicted - as a child of God, as a member of a local church, and as a pastor - that church today is downright WEAK and ANEMIC in our prayer life compared to the first body of believers that served God in Jerusalem! [I will set this story in Acts 4 up before reading this.]

Acts 4:23-28, 29-31 NIV

23 On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices **together** in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. 25 You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: " 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? 26 The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.' 27 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. 29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to **speak your word with great boldness**. 30 Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." 31 After they **prayed**, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God **boldly**.

Can you even begin to IMAGINE that kind of POWER IN PRAYER? They prayed with such faith that the EARTH LITERALLY SHOOK with the power of God among them! That is incredible. In my heart, I WISH that WE could experience the power of God like that. Wouldn't that be amazing? But this kind of thinking leads me to what I believe is the REAL QUESTION that faces us as a church in 2017.

What REALLY needs to be SHAKEN at CHC right now?

I know that some of you may inwardly long for a movement of God that even is a whisper of the wind that blew in Jerusalem some 2,000 years ago. But like me, you wonder WHY the church today is NOT experiencing the power of God like that anymore. You may wonder if it is even POSSIBLE anymore. **I want to tell you today that while I do not believe that God is bound to do what he did in the early church in EXACTLY the same way, he does promise to pour out his Spirit on us and do through us - AS THE CHURCH - BEYOND anything that we could ever even ASK FOR or IMAGINE! [Ephesians 3:20-21]**

I have TASTED a measure of this in my own life in the church. In fact, I have tasted it in varying forms in 3 DIFFERENT CHURCHES that I have been a part of over the course of my life. I tasted it in Vilonia, Arkansas just a year after I was saved when God moved on us in a REVIVAL SERVICE that lasted over 3 weeks and in which over 100 people gave their lives to Christ in that small town. 4 members of my own family were saved in that revival! I also tasted it at a church in Moss Bluff, Louisiana during my last year in High School and during my early college years. There, I saw the church put aside petty differences and really embrace the WORD OF GOD with a passion. Many people came to Christ during those years as well, but the thing that stood out most to me in those years was a deep love of the Word of God and a deep love for others in the Body of Christ. The last great outpouring of the Spirit that I experienced was right here at CHC. As in the first two experiences, many people came to Christ when God moved on us in those days. **But the thing that stands out most to me are the DEEP INWARD WORKS that God did IN US and that CHANGED how we "did church."** It was a TASTE of what the author of Hebrews wrote about: **Hebrews 12:26-29 NIV**

26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." 27 The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken--that is, created things--so that what cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire."

During that time in my life, God moved in such a way that he STRIPPED AWAY anything that did not relate directly to my life of faith. It was terrifying and exciting and refreshing and intense. And we saw God do MIRACLES around us. I can remember seeing people delivered from addictions and spiritual oppression. We saw marriages healed in direct answer to prayer. We even watched in awe as God heard our prayer to REMOVE the only ABORTION CLINIC in North Mississippi. That

story alone was a picture of a dramatic and quick intervention of God in order to REMOVE that slaughterhouse. And in the years since, we have continued to see God work in astonishing ways through us as a church. But, especially in those days and for a time, **God REMOVED the barriers that made our prayers anemic**, and we saw some AMAZING answers to prayer. **In fact, CHC has NEVER been the same since that season in 1994.** I believe that if we had not experienced that season, we might not even have SURVIVED the changes we have seen in our culture and community since that time. **But let me remind you once again: before he ever did those things THROUGH CHC, he had to do some powerful works WITHIN us. This is because the power of God that is at work WITHIN US will determine the power of God that will be displayed THROUGH US. Therefore . . .**

God will shake US before he will shake the WORLD around us!

You see, I believe it is important to consider what might HINDER our prayers as a church family. These hindrances are the things that must be SHAKEN within us in order for us to see powerful answers to our individual and corporate prayers. The early church story in Acts will help us with this. What did he shake in them?

God shakes the SELF-RELIANCE and SIN that DIVIDES us.

They were like us. They had families and jobs and hobbies. They had hang-ups and frustrations and distractions and desires just like us. But God CORRALED them into a UNIFIED BODY that flipped the world upside down! How?

***They trusted God for the OUTPOURING of the HOLY SPIRIT.**

Acts 1:14 – “They were all continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.”

-Their POWER was completely dependent upon the filling of the Holy Spirit!

*Are YOU filled with the Holy Spirit?

Augustine said: “Without God, we cannot; but without us, God will not.”

-Their prayers for God’s power were CONSISTENT. **God shakes prayerlessness!** The word CONTINUALLY (Prokartereo) means that they were constantly DEVOTED TO prayer together. They gave it constant attention and were faithfully praying. (to continue steadfastly in a thing.) This same word is used in **ACTS 2:42.**

[RECALL MIDNIGHT CRY prayer times at CHC in 1994][Church open 24/7]

-Are we praying as a CHURCH together?

-Are we praying as SMALL GROUPS together?

-Are we praying as FAMILIES together?

Samuel Chadwick said, “The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray!”

***They sought God with ABSOLUTE UNITY! Acts 4:24 NIV**

24 When they heard this, they raised their voices **together** in prayer to God.

-**Together=In One Accord** [Same word used in Acts 1:14, 2:1, and 4:23]

-HOMOTHYADON=To RUSH ALONG in UNISON!

*The early church was not a building; it was a PASSIONATE MOVEMENT!

*These early believers were PASSIONATE WORSHIPPERS! Acts 2:46-47

46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 **praising God** and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

[Worship at CHC]

***They lived in TRUE COMMUNITY with one another.**

-They SHARED their TIME, TREASURES, and LIVES with one another.

*See Acts 2:44: All the believers were together and had everything in common.

-They TRUSTED one another during times of GREAT PERSECUTION!

Who are the “companions” that you go to when you face trouble or trials? Who will ENGAGE with you in passionate prayer when you are struggling or need direction?

*The fact that their companions IMMEDIATELY began to pray to God spoke of the kind of spirit and mindset that they possessed. They were folk of UNITY & FAITH.

*The fact that they went to this particular group speaks of the great TRUST that they had in one another. Talk like this was religious and political SUICIDE in that culture and time. They had to really TRUST that what they said would not be handled CARELESSLY. **[Confidentiality Vs. Gossip!]**

-In fact, when all was said and done, they JOINED with them in boldness!

-This was in fact the VERY PRAYER that they prayed: Give us BOLDNESS!

-They SAW how God dealt with unrepentant sin in their midst. **[Acts 5]**

*Our experience with REPENTANCE and SIN at CHC.

***Their prayers were driven by God’s PURPOSES, not their PREFERENCES!**

What do we find the church praying about in Acts?

“Prayer is primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief. It is not surprising that prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den...Until you know that life is war, you cannot know what prayer is for: Prayer is for the accomplishment of a wartime mission.” **John Piper - Desiring God**

-This is why their prayers were so intense! Acts 4:31 – Prayed=To CRY OUT!

In what way are OUR PRAYERS focused on GOD'S WORK in this world rather than on OUR WANTS? Remember, God will SHAKE US before he shakes the WORLD around us!

***What needs to be SHAKEN in YOUR OWN LIFE right now?**

-Personal Sin? Prayerlessness? Disunity with others at CHC?

***Will you commit to PRAY regularly with others at CHC (in your LIFE GROUP, in your family, with a friend) for GOD'S WILL to be done AT and THROUGH CHC?**

Ephesians 3:20-21 NIV

20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Let's pray.