

7/17/22 - Acts 4:23-31 - "Prayerful Submission"

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[0 : 00] It's great to be gathered. If you're new or with our church gatherings, just a thing that will help you is just, if you have your physical copy of God's word or maybe on your app, whatever your weapon might be, keep it open as we go through the passage and take notes of things.

There's nothing better than actually going through like a sermon notebook at the end of the year or like years down the road and look at back upon that time of random notes on the page that might be able to actually encourage you at different times and seasons of your life.

So Bible's open, notebook's ready. I really hope that we can tune our hearts to God's word today and be very attentive to what he desires to speak.

So with that, I would like to pray as we go into the passage that was just read. So if you wanna join me, we are going to turn to ancient words right now.

Father, we come to you in submission to your word as your word holds perfect authority over our lives, absolute authority, that it's inerrant, that it's not a question of if it's right or wrong.

[1 : 27] It is always right. And when that comes against our lives, it can sometimes hurt. It can sometimes not feel comfortable, but we know that your word accomplishes great purpose in a Christian's life.

And so we turn to your word today, looking to be edified, looking to be fed, just as you fed your people in the wilderness by manna. Feed us today from your word.

And we praise in Jesus' precious holy name. Amen. Amen. Amen. So we've been in a progressive sort of set of passages the last several weeks.

As since chapter three has been like unfolding a narrative and a situation regarding the crossing of two paths, one of the crippled man outside of the gate and the two apostles walking up to the gate at the hour of prayer.

And we see that this was the second offering of the day of the Talmud in the Jewish culture, the afternoon offering. And this was a perpetual offering, something that God instituted in the Old Testament.

[2 : 47] And we see that at this crossing of two paths, this man ended up being physically healed from his physically disabled life since birth.

This guy's over 40 years old. And this healing served as not only an illustration for these apostles going into the temple courts, but also to validate their message.

This is an illustration, a validation of God's plan to restore us spiritually disabled people that have been spiritually disabled from birth, just as this physically disabled man from birth.

And our disability stems from the problem of humanity, which is due to sin. That stems from the Garden of Eden. And so when they enter into this courtyard, Peter and John, they are proclaiming boldly the gospel.

This was a powerful message to say the least. And last week, we dove into specifically coming out of that message and speaking solely upon the trial and the charges and the arrest of these apostles.

[4 : 10] You know, it was nighttime, and so they were put in jail for the night. And they were trying before the Sanhedrin and they could not punish them because the fruit of the message was undeniable.

We saw that last week, how we observed the fruit of our lives being rooted in the message of how might our fruit actually be disconnected from the fruit of the message of Scripture.

And so we have for us, before us, an issue of the apostles' fruit of their message bearing witness and it being undeniable to Sanhedrin released them, unable to charge them.

But they threatened them. And so today, these apostles are released and they arrive back with their friends.

What a testimony of unity, of that moment of running back to people that you were just disconnected with. The night in jail was pretty lonely.

[5 : 27] It was dark. It was cold. And what a unity among this community of just suffering together, empathizing together, this Christian community.

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

And look at the plurality of verse 24. And when they heard it, when the community of God heard it, they lifted their voices together to God.

Imagine the joy and the tension of such a moment. Imagine the joy. Because God prevailed against the Sanhedrin.

Those guys who have been studying all their lives. The royal holy family. These guys know their stuff. And you got a bunch of fishermen who God prevailed.

[6 : 39] What joy. But what tension. That looming sort of moment of knowing that there's a storm coming. coming. Because there were some pretty legitimate threats against this church to discontinue what they have been doing all this time.

What a picture of the plurality of empathy. The plurality of suffering. And the shelter that the church finds in one another. And the concern that we have for one another.

But weighing in the balance, sort of that looming storm on the horizon, looming in the balance, are two roads to travel. One road that's regulated by man and the other road that's regulated by God.

Standing back for a moment and realizing that we're studying a literary work. This is a letter. This is essentially a record that Luke put together, a physician.

And we saw in chapter one the reason why he was putting this together which is an orderly account. We have to ask ourselves why? Why didn't he give this transcript of Peter's first sermon but he's giving a transcript of their prayer?

[8 : 01] Why was this necessarily important? And what's the purpose? And for that reason, we study prayerful submission as the sermon title today.

As we're going to see his aim being the boldness of the church is found in prayerful submission to God's will amid opposition which seeks God's power to endure.

From this stems boldness, from this stems contentment, from this stems all that the church needs in the face of opposition. And so let's break this down to how their prayer is structured.

So the first section we'll have today is prayerful submission to God's attributes. This is what they do in this corporate prayer.

We're studying a transcript of their prayers and what we find is that this prayerful submission gives attention to God's attributes.

[9 : 12] It says, 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.

All things were created by him and for him. Colossians, right? In the beginning of this corporate prayer, this group desired to sort of backseat their concerns.

This isn't to minimize their concerns. I believe that their concerns would be valid of like, well, the Sanhedrin, these guys just threatened me. You saw what they did to Jesus. This is kind of concerning to us.

But look what they do. They don't just jump to, God, give us protection and everything and do this and do that and do this. And it's like, you put a quarter in the slot and all of a sudden pull the lever and then boom, it's like a spiritual vending machine as often is explained in models of prayer.

No. This church comes together in a time of uncertainty with a storm coming across the horizon and they spend time worshiping God for who he is.

[10 : 26] Remember in Luke 11, Peter and John were inquiring of Jesus Christ, teach us, Lord, how to pray.

Right? And he says, pray like this, our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Maybe the KJV version was apparent back then.

It seems like all my scripture memory from childhood is all KJV. But he gave them a model to pray like this.

Whether sickness or health, whether feasts or famine, pray like this. It's not optional.

because this is pivotal in how we view life, theologically speaking, and all the things that we have, especially in the sense of dire situations that are dangerous for us that we face.

[11 : 34] You see, a rich prayer life takes intentional time to tend to glorifying God rather than glorifying our needs. this produces contentment.

This produces self-disregard. And now this, like I said, this isn't saying that our needs don't matter. However, they're still long for the ride, but they're in the back seat at this time.

God is the moderator of your affliction. If you are afflicted in this time period, and I know many situations of which this church is afflicted in their lives, in circumstances.

But did you know that God is the moderator of your affliction? How could we ever doubt him amid such times of affliction? This church, facing uncertain times, if they could read what was up ahead for them in Acts and through church history, I'm sure that they would be even more frozen in fear and even more frozen on their knees to God, saying, God, we really, I thought we needed help, but we really need some serious help.

I really don't want this part of my body to be detached in the name of Jesus, but if it is your will, so be it. It is well with my soul.

[13 : 02] This church did not have concern. they proclaimed that it is God who is sovereign, who is holding all things together, who by his hand created all things and sustaining all things.

This is the omnipotent, all-powerful God, Lord of all. And this is just one verse. Yeah, we're gonna be here past noon, just so you know.

I'm just kidding. In such a short section, though, I do believe the arrangement of this corporate prayer can attest to a devoted attitude that ought to reach the depths of our convictions even in our day-to-day.

Simply to say, are we coming to God in prayer glorifying him first or glorifying our concerns, our needs, treating God like a magical genie, or a spiritual vending machine?

You see, prayer, as it were for them, changes those who have petitions, those who utter the very prayers to God.

[14:18] It changes them. And you see, if we desire to glorify God in prayer, we have to have a proper knowledge of who he is.

We have to have something in the front seat in order to guide us along. Right? Because when you approach your prayer life in this type of model, pray like this.

This deepens our faith in God. This deepens our faith in him, especially when our circumstances least testify of the very attributes we declare when the healing doesn't come, when the cancer becomes terminal, when you're facing other Christians laying in a deathbed suffering greatly in their health, or experiencing unsightly situations and horror and terror in this life, seeing marriages suffering, when all of these things come in full circle and we'll just say life happens, we turn to God with great needs, but nothing can surpass the great worth of God who is sovereign over it all.

This is prayerful submission to the attributes of God. The richness of corporate prayer is rooted first in corporate declaration of the richness of God.

But, where might we find record of this richness? You might be like, well, I didn't, I didn't, I don't read the books you read, Brent.

[16:06] I don't know all these theological terms, and even terms that I make up sometimes on the spot. Right? All of these things, I don't know, Brent. Well, let's just read a little bit further, because where we find this within these newer Christians in this temple is they all look to his word.

His word gives us another attribute and roots us in the attributes of God. In the second section, we see this as we continue in verse 25, prayerful submission to God's word.

This is where we find who God is. This is where they rooted themselves and rested upon. We see in verse 25, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, why did the Gentiles rage in the people's plot in vain?

The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed. 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 all the peoples of Israel, everyone, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

in making this corporate declaration of the richness of God, they turned their attention to Psalm 2, Psalm of David, a reminder of the sovereignty of God.

[17:58] When the sovereignty of God is something that seems a little bit fluid in life as if situations are going left or right and it's like, I'm going to hide in your word because this is kind of crazy out here and we live in a crazy world, hiding in the covering and the sheets of the word, a shelter for those who are weak.

And so they hide themselves in Psalm 2. And this is a psalm that describes the victory of God and his anointed one. Specifically in Psalm 2, it's in regard to David being the chosen one that God had raised up and of which all the nations had conspired against him, even his own son, were conspiring against him.

And we see something developing because what they connect this to is huge. They connect verse 25 with a little bit later in verse 27 to 28.

because the Gentiles raised, they plot in vain as attested in the Psalm. This is directly a type of suffering, a type of fulfillment and hostility that was wielded against Jesus Christ from Jewish and pagan nations, all people against Jesus Christ, his anointed.

There was something that was revealing in David's situation that they were looking forward to in faith back then of which we see connects the dots of finding its greatest fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

[19 : 42] In reflection of both the opposition against David and the opposition against Jesus Christ, David's situation, specifically him being the anointed one then, pointed forward to the cross and we see that this church had agreement that God is still sovereign over the most horrific circumstances facing the church, as if their affliction, their opposition is also pointing back to the cross.

David pointing forward, the church's opposition pointing backward to the cross. And so this is something regarding God's sovereignty that is true in the past, the present, or the future, a truth that will remain even if these apostles knew what would happen to their head, even if the apostles and Tyndale knew that the Bible would be floating down through history in a river of his blood, of the martyrs that went before us and we see that his sovereignty remains through it all, of which he has predestined to take place.

You see, boldness amid hostility in the Christian life is theological. It's always been theological. This boldness gazes our attention to the cross, of which we receive steadfastness in courage.

It gazes our attention in the future of the steadfastness of hope, of eternal life. That this body that's all messed up in more than many different ways, our minds that are often just confused in the reality of our situations, we know it all will make sense at a certain time.

Indeed, God is putting together a tapestry and from our perspective it seems like a bunch of knots and random strings and colors, but what he's putting together is a masterpiece.

[21 : 49] At the center of that masterpiece is Jesus Christ and the hope in the cross. But God, as proclaimed by David, as proclaimed at the cross, God always wins.

Every knee shall bow. every knee shall bow. For us today, the word of God speaks the same message for us that the church will prevail.

And the world can make it difficult or they can make it a lot easier. But as promised in the word, we see that it will be difficult because the world hates Jesus.

This is a theological reality. And look how they move in their prayers. They go from infallible truth through the mouth of David that God spoke.

We see now in this third section, if you could put it up on the screen, we see the prayerful submission to God's mission.

[23 : 10] We see in verse 29, and now, after all that, after declaring, reminding one another who God is, his sovereignty over all, he's the creator of all things, the oceans and everything in the ocean, every speck, every micrometer, microcentimeter in this space, in the vastness of space, is his, after all that and now, after what God has spoken through his word, see us, God.

It sort of utters that same phraseology of which David says. It's not saying that God doesn't see them, but it's reassuring them that they're having this communication, a relational commitment to God for him to see their trouble, to see their threats, just like David, just like Christ, and to grant his servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.

This is prayerful submission to God's mission. This church had one united objective in mind, to continue through the warfare of the world with the sword of the word.

They turned no further. They didn't skip town. They didn't buckle under pressure and recant all the message of the gospel.

They simply asked to be able to continue through the warfare of the world with the sword of the word. This is huge.

[25 : 06] This is huge considering the opposition that this church faced. Because they identified themselves in the suffering of David, the suffering of Christ, which stems back to David, it stems to Christ, it stems forward, of which even we faced many centuries away.

We see that this plead for boldness is given by way of serving. By serving. By serving. His power through their service, just as God exposed his power in Christ's service.

This is Philippians 2. That Jesus Christ came to serve, not to be served. That there was no concern of self. We'll see more of that next week, specifically.

But this boldness is given by way of his power through the service of the church. That service is between a master and a slave.

And we can only serve one master. And it is asking for boldness to be serving God in this life. Church, this is the mighty power of what we, of the truth that we have in Scripture that our hearts must rest upon.

[26 : 26] It's in the power of God working through our trouble, through the mouth of David, reaching out to heal by stretching out his hand to do that work.

We can have all the answers memorized. We can have all the tactics and the methods executed perfectly. But without the power of God, we are hopeless.

And if the church is hopeless, in this hopeless world, boy, how deep is that hopelessness. I want us to think for a moment.

Not only did this church restrain themselves themselves in petition to praise God for who he is.

Not only did this church turn to the word to speak into their circumstance, but they also did not ask God to change anything regarding their circumstance.

[27 : 42] parents. They are asking God to change them. This is huge for us, church.

And while the bridge between them back then, the first century church, and us today, yes, that bridge is vast. Much has happened between that time.

God is not a far distance from God's relationship with us, of who God is, that he's unchanging.

He's immutable. He cannot change. He's all sufficient. It is the same God for us today.

And Acts 4 specifically should engage our attitudes in prayer. prayer. Let's stand back for a moment. Their attitude, they're not looking for credit.

[28 : 42] David wasn't looking for credit. Christ, all the credit was due to Christ, right? This church knew that too.

They weren't looking for credit. It was a Christ-centric reality, a theological reality that made it possible for this church to not declare anything of their own doing.

Nothing of their own doing. Not even the things that God would do through this apostolic body. They did not have any concern of credit, followers, likes. They didn't need money. It wasn't sowing seeds of faith.

It wasn't wealth. It wasn't safety. It wasn't cars. It wasn't jets. They weren't concerned in binding the powers of Satan and loosing the chains and casting away the opposition.

Their concern was the boldness to speak for God to come into their circumstance and to change them. Now, it's not to say that God doesn't care about our safety, that he doesn't care about all the things that we want to petition that may be less important than others.

[29 : 55] God desires to hear the prayers of his people. But their concern was for God to change them. It is, this is a challenge, I believe, to our culture today where the narrative of our day begs attention to our own wills rather than submitting to God's will.

And this could turn into another sermon, probably another series. But what we see is a sort of main point developing in that back then is Jesus Christ more, worth, worth more than their very life, than their very safety, than their own security?

And that he was. And so the same question begs in our life today, is Jesus Christ worth more than your very life?

Than your security? Than any riches of security or safety? The Bible promises that the suffering of the church is actually required of the church.

It's not looking for trouble and getting yourself in trouble. Of course, trouble will find the church, but it's enduring through when trouble comes. 2 Timothy 3 12 says that the gospel cuts against the grain of comfort.

[31 : 19] It says, all who want to live a godly life in Jesus Christ will be persecuted. It's not might be persecuted. It's not, well, if you do this and do that, you will be persecuted.

They will be persecuted. When you live along the contours of the gospel and what the gospel describes as a holy way of living, the world is going to come against you and you can just turn on the news today and how that is very much so appearance.

But the good news for us today, church, for all who are attentive to hear the word of God today is that the greatest safety and security offered by God may never be physical in this life, no matter how hard you pray for something to occur.

But what God does guarantee is that we are spiritually secure in Christ. There is nothing, no power in hell could remove the promise of God upon a Christian's life.

That we are sealed with the promise. We are set apart and what God sets apart, no man can set back. This is a theological reality that has strengthened our forefathers who have given their lives to the very service of God that we see these apostles facing at this time.

[32 : 52] And may the same be true for us today. And whether our country in the United States gives us the right to speak or not, and I believe that I can speak on behalf of all of us, I mean, it's a great privilege and honor to be given the freedom of speech in this country, especially all who have died across seas to fight wars and have stood at Capitol Hill to preserve that right boldly in the marketplace.

But whether our country gives us that right to speak, it is not their right to give. This is a right that is granted by no one else but God himself for the church to speak.

That's bold. And so we see as this concluding passage as everything winds down in verse 31, and when they had prayed, look what happened.

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 all boldness.

God answers prayer. God changes us through prayer. Something about the unity and priority of this church body allowed an expedited response, a near immediate response.

[34 : 26] As we could imagine at the onset of this corporate prayer going to saying, guys, let's call out together to God in prayer. We could imagine at the onset of this, these Christians were pretty shaken up by the world.

They were shaken up by the threats from the Sanhedrin. They know what they did to Christ. They know that this could be uncertain and they were, I would say, shaken up. And now at the outset of this prayer, God shook them up a little bit, I would say.

Not that this was an earthquake, but I believe that this shook the Christians in this time period, giving them this overwhelming sense of the Holy Spirit evident in their lives to proclaim the gospel, to continue in that bold work.

No words could probably explain other than the deep guidance of the Holy Spirit overwhelming them in their troubled hearts and bringing contentment to boldness.

You see, God changes us in prayer. It's impossible to explain. It's subjective at times, but what we know through the Bible and through our own lives and the lives of our forefathers is that God changes us in prayer.

[35 : 46] And we can't really explain it all the time, nor do we have to, but we know that it's true. His word attests to God working through the corporate prayers of the church as well. And the unity and priorities of the church fan the flame of the Holy Spirit working through them.

Think about that unity going back to this church empathizing, caring for, rallying around, saying, church, we need to pray, and the church showing up to that prayer meeting.

Amen? Why are prayer meetings so little attended? Why does it seem optional to attend prayer meetings?

There was unity. The priorities of this church were vastly different. even in face of this opposition. This ought to encourage us to unify around Jesus Christ's name.

Not Steel Valley Church or any church name or any person or personality. This says to rally around, unify around Jesus Christ's name. And here we will find a people that are surrendering to all gossip, surrendering to all anger, surrendering to bitterness, surrendering to jealousy.

[37 : 01] jealousy. Here we have to, we find ourselves be aware of ourselves of misprioritizing things in this life, not treasuring things that shouldn't be treasured or finding success in things that God doesn't define as successful or relevant in this life where God never told us to be necessarily relevant.

we are a countercultural church that cuts against the grain of the culture. May we never be found guilty of quenching the Holy Spirit from working mightily through us.

This unity testifies to the fanning of the flame of God as we studied back in 1 Thessalonians. So may God change us, may God unify us, may God prioritize our lives, may God embolden us.

And while that bridge is vastly wide between them and us today, the same Spirit of God indwells and empowers his church as bold witnesses in the face of opposition.

Going back to that question at the onset of the passage, why is Luke writing all of this? Why did he desire to detail this transcript of this prayer?

[38 : 17] The boldness of the church is found in prayerful submission to God's will amid opposition which seeks God's power to endure.

It is nothing in our own power, but it's God's power who sustains. May we too be found bold in our proclamation of the gospel because the gospel paid the highest price on our behalf.

And the value of Jesus Christ is worth more than any comforts that is offered in this life. Let's take that and let us evaluate our lives, our priorities, our attitudes, and allow that to change our very lives.

And Lord willing, let this city experience the gospel of Jesus Christ through the corporate prayers and the corporate service of this church body.

Let's close in prayer as we turn to a time of singing and continued reflection upon God's word in the message. Let's pray.

[39 : 25] Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.