

Prayer that Shakes the Church

Acts 4:23-31

This morning we will conclude our journey through the Book of Acts and *What Matters in the Church*, but we will continue our journey in January. We consider this morning *Prayer that Shakes the Church*.

Acts 4:23) After they (Peter and John) were released, they went to their own people and reported everything the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24) When they heard this, they raised their voices together to God and said, “Master, you are the one who made the heaven, the earth, and the sea, and everything in them. 25) You said through the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David your servant: Why do the Gentiles rage and the peoples plot futile things? 26) The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers assemble together against the Lord and against his Messiah. 27) For, in fact, in this city both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, 28) to do whatever your hand and your will had predestined to take place. 29) And now, Lord, consider their threats, and grant that your servants may speak your word with all boldness, 30) while you stretch out your hand for healing, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” 31) When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly.

The first prayer meeting in Acts 1 unified the church. The actual prayer is not recorded, probably because the prayer meeting lasted 10 days. We come now to the second recorded prayer meeting following the healing miracle of the crippled beggar and the resulting imprisonment of Peter and John. Following their release, they went to their own people and reported everything the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this – they prayed for boldness: *grant that your servants may speak your word with all boldness*, – *parresia* = *fearless confidence*.

The Church’s first prayer request: Boldness – *parresia* = fearless confidence.

Do you need boldness? Boldness to step out in faith and believe God again?

Boldness to ask God for the impossible? Boldness to step out and stand up for integrity, righteousness and values? Boldness to share Jesus with people who need the Lord? Does First Baptist Lafayette need boldness?

Prayer and boldness weld together in the Bible. Hebrews 4:16 – *Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.* As believers, followers of Jesus, people of faith,

God extends to us the awesome privilege to approach him in prayer with boldness. We can pray with fearless confidence for three reasons:

1. **We Pray with Fearless Confidence because of God's Sovereignty.** We remember from the first prayer meeting in Acts 1 that the word prayer – *proseuche*, means *toward God – communication which addresses God*. As these Acts Christians gather for the second prayer meeting, *they raised their voices together to God*. Listen to a person pray, eaves drop on any prayer meeting, and you will learn quickly what that person or that group believes about God. Jesus commanded us to address God in our prayers as “*Our Father in heaven*.” **God is our heavenly Father, worthy of our respect.** In the same way we should speak to our earthly fathers with respect, we should address our heavenly Father with supreme respect. Here in Acts 4, they addressed God as *Master* – “sovereign Lord.” To address God as “sovereign” acknowledges God’s authority. **God is the sovereign authority maintaining supreme control over all of His creation.** God preserves in existence the creation which He brought into being. *Sovereign Lord, you are the one who made the heaven, the earth, and the sea, and everything in them*. God created all of this world, including the universe, the galaxies, the planets, the stars, and specifically, planet Earth, upon which he created and called into being all living things, including human existence.

The Bible declares God’s creative sovereignty: Listen to Job speak, Abraham’s contemporary, one of the oldest voices of the Old Testament: *But ask the animals, and they will instruct you; ask the birds of the sky, and they will tell you. Or speak to the earth, and it will instruct you; let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? The life of every living thing is in his hand, as well as the breath of all mankind.* (Job 12:7-10) Listen to the Psalmist declare in Psalm 95: *For the Lord is a great God, a great King above all gods. The depths of the earth are in his hand, and the mountain peaks are his. The sea is his; he made it. His hands formed the dry land.* (3-5) Listen to Paul affirm in Romans 1:20 – *For his (God’s) invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made. As a result, people are without excuse.* Listen to John introduce Jesus: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.* (John 1:1-3) We can approach God in prayer with fearless confidence because He is the sovereign Lord!

2. **We Can Pray with Fearless Confidence because of God's Will.** Listen to their prayer: *You said through the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of our father David*

your servant: Why do the Gentiles rage and the peoples plot futile things? 26) The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers assemble together against the Lord and against his Messiah. 27) For, in fact, in this city both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, 28) to do whatever your hand and your will had predestined to take place.

Not only does God rule with sovereign authority over His creation, but He guides and directs the course of events to fulfill the purposes which he has in mind.

Theologically, this is God's providence. Belief in God's providence assures us that God is present and active in our lives. Our existence unfolds within the "*hand of God*". We can face the future without fear because of our confidence that events and circumstances do not happen simply by chance. We can pray with fearless confidence, knowing that God hears and answers and acts on our prayers. We can face dangers and threats, knowing that God is aware and involved.

How then must we understand the connection between God's will and prayer?

God's Will is Predetermined. God's will always functions within the jurisdiction of God's intentional, deliberate, gracious, elective, and predestined plans and purposes. Because God is all-knowing – omniscient, God knows beforehand, in advance, what He is doing and is going to do. God does what He is going to do because He is God, and He activates His actions and His will independent of our prayers and regardless of our faith. Evidences of God's predetermined will and purpose reside in all categories of creation; in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Messiah; in the special calling of nations and people; in the functions of the church; in the distribution of spiritual gifts; and in individual and corporate prayer. God's will, God's plans, and God's purposes remain definite and fixed, and are not subject to revision. Job concluded this about God, "*I know that you can do anything and no plan of yours can be thwarted.*" (For discussion on God's predetermined will, see Erickson, *Introducing Christian Doctrine*, 2nd edition, p. 144 and Glisson, *Knowing and Doing the Will of God*, pp. 127-141).

But predetermination is only one dimension of God's will. The Bible also teaches that **God's Will is Permissive.** God's will is fixed and definite, and yet we are commanded to pray and we are encouraged by James 5:16 that "*the prayer of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect.*"

How, then, does God's predetermined will and God's permissive will work together to engage God's plans and purposes? Again, the Bible is clear that God works His will in partnership and collaboration with humans. For example, many of Jesus' healing miracles required the act of human faith. The confident request of the centurion for the healing of his servant (Matthew 9:5-13) and the woman with the hemorrhage, clinging to Jesus garment (Matthew 9:18-22) demonstrate the act of faith and petition, resulting in the miracle of healing. When Jesus walked on

water (Matthew 14:22-33), Peter requested to walk on the water to meet Him, and Jesus enabled him. Jesus could have enabled all of the disciples to walk on water, but only Peter asked and believed. God wills the end (the miracle, the plan, the purpose) and God also wills the means. Prayer and faith does not change what God has purposed and predetermined. Prayer is the means by which God purposes and predetermines.

Time in this sermon will not permit understanding all of the dynamics and misunderstandings of God's permissive will. Why do tragic events and catastrophic crises occur? Why are evil people, corrupt organizations, and dysfunctional systems allowed to function and flourish? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do many good and godly people suffer and irreligious and ungodly people prosper? Why does Peter affirm 1 Peter 4:19 that Christians should endure suffering patiently because God is the One permitting it? The Acts 4 Christians were asking the same kind of questions in their situation. We are left with Romans 8:28 – *all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*

3. We Can Pray with Fearless Confidence because of God's Power. Every prayer meeting in the book of Acts demonstrated and unleashed God's power. In the Acts 1 prayer meeting, God demonstrated His power by filling them with the Spirit so they could witness and preach. In the Acts 12 prayer meeting, God unleashed His power by shaking loose the prison doors and releasing Peter. In the Acts 13 prayer meeting, God revealed His power by uniting the Antioch church and they appointed Paul and Barnabas as the first missionaries. Here in the Acts 4 prayer meeting, *“when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken – esaleuthe, literally, to make to rock. Their prayer made the place rock!* In the Old Testament, shaking phenomena signified God's presence. In Exodus 19, when Moses descended from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments, the mountain behind him became enveloped in smoke *“because the Lord came down on it in fire. Its smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain shook violently.”* (Exodus 19:18) When Isaiah encountered God in the temple, the Seraphim hovered and called to another: *“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Armies; his glory fills the whole earth. The foundations of the doorways shook.”* (Isaiah 6:2-4) When God's presence showed up at the prayer meeting, the place where were praying shook, *“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly”* – with fearless confidence.

We can pray with fearless confidence because of God's sovereignty, because of God's providence, and because of God's omnipotence. God is all-powerful, able to do hard things, impossible things, all things.

God's power overpowers any and all threats to His church. *And now, Lord,*

consider their threats... The same threats, plots, and rages against Jesus loomed like a large shadow over these Christians, but they prayed with fearless confidence because they believed that God's power will always, always, always overpower any and all threats to His people and His church.

God's power activates supernatural miracles. *And now, Lord, consider their threats while you stretch out your hand for healing, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.*" We might expect them to petition God for deliverance and protection from the persecutions and threats. Instead, they petition God in prayer for more of the same, requesting instead for boldness and additional supernatural signs and wonders.

The first Acts prayer meeting unified the church – the second Acts prayer meeting shook the church. **Does First Baptist Lafayette need a new spiritual "shaking"?** Prayer moves the hand of God. Prayer shakes the church. We need prayer meetings that will shake the place.