



The Acts of the Spirit

GATHERING THE CHURCH

ACTS 4:23-31

"THE PRAYER"

AUGUST 13, 2023

AT A GLANCE

Among the many prayers we pray when facing difficult circumstances, let us pray for boldness and to be equipped for the calling we face.

CONTEXT

The book of Acts is the theological history of the Church. In the previous weeks, we explored how God's people (the Church) have become the place where heaven and earth meet. At this point many are responding to the Gospel and reordering their lives around faith in Jesus.

Recently, Peter and John healed a lame man in Jesus' name. After urging the gathering crowd to repent and return to God through faith in Jesus, they are apprehended by the religious leaders. After being ordered to cease their ministry they return to camp to pray for courage to fulfill their calling.

Recently, Peter and John healed a lame man in Jesus' name. As a crowd gathers, they preach about repenting and returning to God through faith in Jesus. Many receive this message of faith, but some also reject it. Specifically, the same religious leaders become greatly annoyed and apprehend Peter and John to stop the spread of this Christian movement.

SERMON SUMMARY

Pastor Joey urged us this Sunday to adopt the perspective and prayer life of the early Christians. As they faced opposition proclaiming new life in Jesus' they had:

- Perspective: They knew God was sovereign over their circumstance and was using them to bring about their good and his will. And...
- Prayer: Therefore, they knew they should pray, not to change those circumstances, but meet them with Christ-like courage necessary to accomplish their calling.

We are to pray in the same way, making sure to ask God, our sovereign authority, to provide what is necessary for us to accomplish the calling he has given us.



DISCUSSION

Extract the Truth: Read Acts 4:23-31

Explore the Self

Pastor Joey stated that we all experience preoccupation with our circumstances and a desire to alleviate them. They are usually uncomfortable and trigger negative emotional responses.

Why do you think our circumstances can be so pre-occupying?

When we try to escape our circumstances, it is usually because we want one or more of the following (each reason is a signpost to a corresponding deeper need that we feel is unmet).

Relief from Sadness and/or Pain
Safety in the midst of Fear
Revenge because of Anger over an Injustice
Want in the midst of Insecurity

- Have you experienced any of these longings when facing an unsavory circumstance? If so, explain.
- Based on the list above, what do your specific longings tell you about your deeper needs?

Difficult circumstances are often the incubator for our personal and spiritual growth. Through these circumstances, we become who we were made to be and therefore experience the deeper satisfaction. But naturally we believe we will be more satisfied with ease and comfort.

- Why are we tempted to believe comfort is more satisfying than experiencing true spiritual transformation?



This document can be used for either personal or group reflection.

Group facilitator: you do not need to ask every question but can select the best ones for your group dynamic.



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Extract the Truth

Joey highlighted that early Christians had clarity around the following truths:

1. **God's Control:** God's sovereignty over our circumstances to bring about our growth and His will.
2. **Our Control:** Their limited control over circumstances yet control to choose how they respond to those circumstances.
3. **Our Purpose:** The calling/mission God has given them.
4. **Our Needs:** They needed God to supply the strength to accomplish their calling

Let's explore each truth...

- 1
 - How does knowing God is in control and using our circumstances for our good/His will change our posture toward negative circumstances when they happen?
- 2
 - Accepting that we do not have control over circumstance is the first step to finding peace. Once we accept that truth, we will more easily focus on the control we have over our responses. This is pivotal to partnering with God to fulfill his calling on our life.
 - How does focusing on what you can control (while relying on God's power) help you to remain productive and positive amid challenges?
- 3
 - Having a calling gives us purpose in life and focus in our struggles. But when we lack a mission, those obstacles become overwhelming or we avoid them all together. Thankfully God has given us all purpose for our life...

To Glorify Him in all we do.
To Become Like Jesus through spiritual growth.
To Share Jesus with the world.

- How does remembering your calling/mission help you to approach circumstances differently?
- 4
 - The early Christians understood the opposition wasn't going to change; they would need to change to press on despite it. Therefore they sought God and their community through prayer to help them meet the demands of reality?
 - How does knowing you can't do it alone affect how you approach challenges?
 - Why then are tempted to isolate during hard times and tackle our challenges alone?



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Experience Transformation

- What is a circumstance you are facing now that you feel preoccupied with?
- Which one of the following longings do you feel towards that circumstance?
 - Relief from Sadness and/or Pain
 - Safety in the midst of Fear
 - Revenge because of Anger over an Injustice
 - Want in the midst of Insecurity
- What do you need from God to meet that deeper need?
- What do you need from your community to meet that deeper need?
- How do you want to grow personally as you through this circumstance?

The Bible (and now even psychology) confirm the following principles:

Desire for Purpose (Calling) = Joy and grit to overcome obstacles on the path to the mission.

Desire for Comfort = Anxiety and preoccupation with unhealthy fleshly desire.

To realign to our calling we have to unearth our desire for who we want to be.

- When you reach the end of your life, what type of person do you want to be known as?
Why does that matter to you?
- What role do you want to have played in God's kingdom?

Engage the World

Pastor Joey challenged us to pray like early Christians for the courage/boldness to persist in the face of those who resist.

- In light of this sermon, what small habit of boldness do you feel led to build this week that helps proclaim new life in Jesus (can be either in word or deed)?

**PREPARE FOR
NEXT WEEK:**



Read Acts 4:32-5:11