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June 23, 2019

Acts 4: 23-31

“I am not an evangelist !?”

²³ After their release, Peter and John returned to the brothers and sisters and reported everything the chief priests and elders had said. ²⁴ They listened, then lifted their voices in unison to God, “Master, you are the one who created the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵ You are the one who spoke by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant:

*Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?*

²⁶ *The kings of the earth took their stand
and the rulers gathered together as one
against the Lord and against his Christ.*

²⁷ Indeed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with Gentiles and Israelites, did gather in this city against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power and plan had already determined would happen. ²⁹ Now, Lord, take note of their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with complete confidence. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to bring healing and enable signs and wonders to be performed through the name of Jesus, your holy servant.” ³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were gathered was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking God’s word with confidence.

Two weeks ago we celebrated Pentecost remembering how the Holy Spirit came to all believers and gave them ability to speak and proclaim the gospel in the different languages of the people who had gathered in Jerusalem. Last Sunday we were with Peter and John witnessing how the Holy Spirit continued to work in and through them. We praised God together with a paralytic man who had been healed in the name of Jesus. The gathering crowds and the many questions gave Peter the opportunity to preach a sermon.

I know that sometimes I preach and you disagree with me. That is good. It means you are thinking. I understand. There are many verses in the Bible that I wish would not be there. There are verses that I want to disagree with. Often it asks too much such as “lay down your life so that you may find life.” It seems totally unrealistic and does not fit my personality. I will continue to preach what I find in the Bible. The gospel is not about making us feel good, comfortable and sleepy. It is about salvation and having a right relationship with God. It is about victory over sin, understanding God’s purpose for your life and the hope of eternal life.

After Peter and John healed the man who has been paralyzed from birth, Peter continued to preach about Jesus. Peter said: “Salvation can be found in no one else. Throughout the whole world, no other name has been given among humans through which we must be saved.” It is in Jesus Christ the Nazarene.

Guess what the priests, captain of the temple guard, the Sadducees did? They commanded them to stop talking. They would not and could not stop. So Peter and John landed in jail where they spent the night. Upon release they were issued a warning to not to talk about Jesus anymore.

The disciples used every opportunity to talk about Jesus. One thing is very clear to me, that if you have experienced Jesus in your life, if you truly met and accepted him, you will be talking about him. That is part of the package. Followers of Christ share about their faith. Will people always like it? Probably not. If they always like what you have to say, maybe you are not sharing the gospel.

My mother was talking with one of the Methodists in Lithuania. Somehow the conversation came to pondering why the church is not really growing. Mom asked, "Have you invited your friends, your family, your neighbors?" The lady answered, "No, of course not, I do not want to upset anybody. We quietly go to our church gathering."

Well, this is clearly not a Biblical way to believe. In Acts 1:8 Jesus said "And you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." He did not say "some of you". We live in a hurting and lonely world. So many people are suffering quietly. We have a message of hope to share. You have a unique story to share. Statistics say about 70% of regular church goers do not share their faith.

This past week we had our VBS. I am becoming more and more convinced that fliers do not work. It is easier, not easy, easier, but rarely, in my experience, have they been productive. The most effective way to encourage participation is by genuine interest in the other person. First comes relationship. Relationships lead into sharing the Gospel. Think of your own experience. Who invited you to faith? To church? I bet 99% of the time it was a person you have known prior to invitation. It could have been a parent or a class mate or a co-worker.

Arguments do not convince people into being Christian. I learned a long time ago, that I'll never be able to argue a person into the kingdom of heaven. By the way, when you share your faith and it turns into an argument, stop. Nobody is ever argued into heaven. We are called to give testimony to the ways God is at work in our lives. We are the witnesses. the Holy Spirit is the advocate or lawyer. It is not our job to be the lawyers.

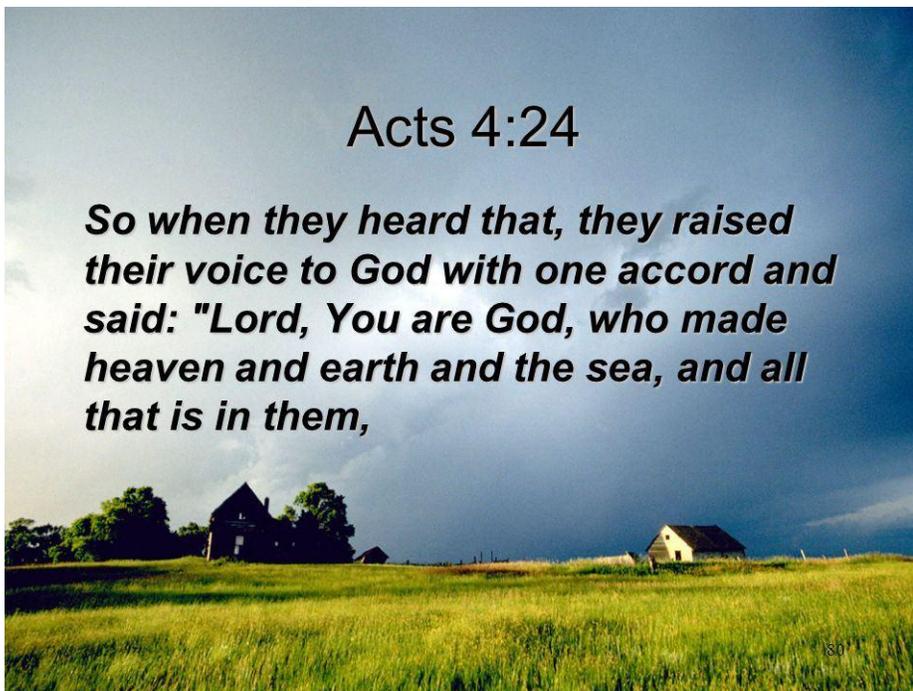
We may find ourselves defending our faith and trying to give a rationale. You do not need to justify your belief. You are to talk about what Jesus is doing in your life.

If you lose the argument you lose the point, and if you win the argument you lose the person. Nobody is ever argued into the kingdom of heaven.

Anything I can talk you into somebody else can talk you out of, but thank God that Jesus Christ is alive and He's the one who builds the church and what we need to do is to recognize the power of the living Christ.

I believe one way that evil keeps working among the believers is by persuading us to be silent. I remember in my faith journey the number one reason I would not talk about my faith was because I wanted to look cool. Could it be that we've grown more concerned about our social standing or reputation than about Christ and his mission? I knew how important is to believe in God. I had faith, but sharing it? No, I did not want people to think of me as a fanatic or a weird person. The other reason for not sharing your faith could be that you are not so sure about your own faith. It could be you do not know how to do it or you are afraid you will not have the answers for people's questions.

Peter and John shared about Jesus and they end up in jail. The authorities told them to not share the gospel. After they got released they went back to the church – the gathering of believers. The first thing they did together was to pray.

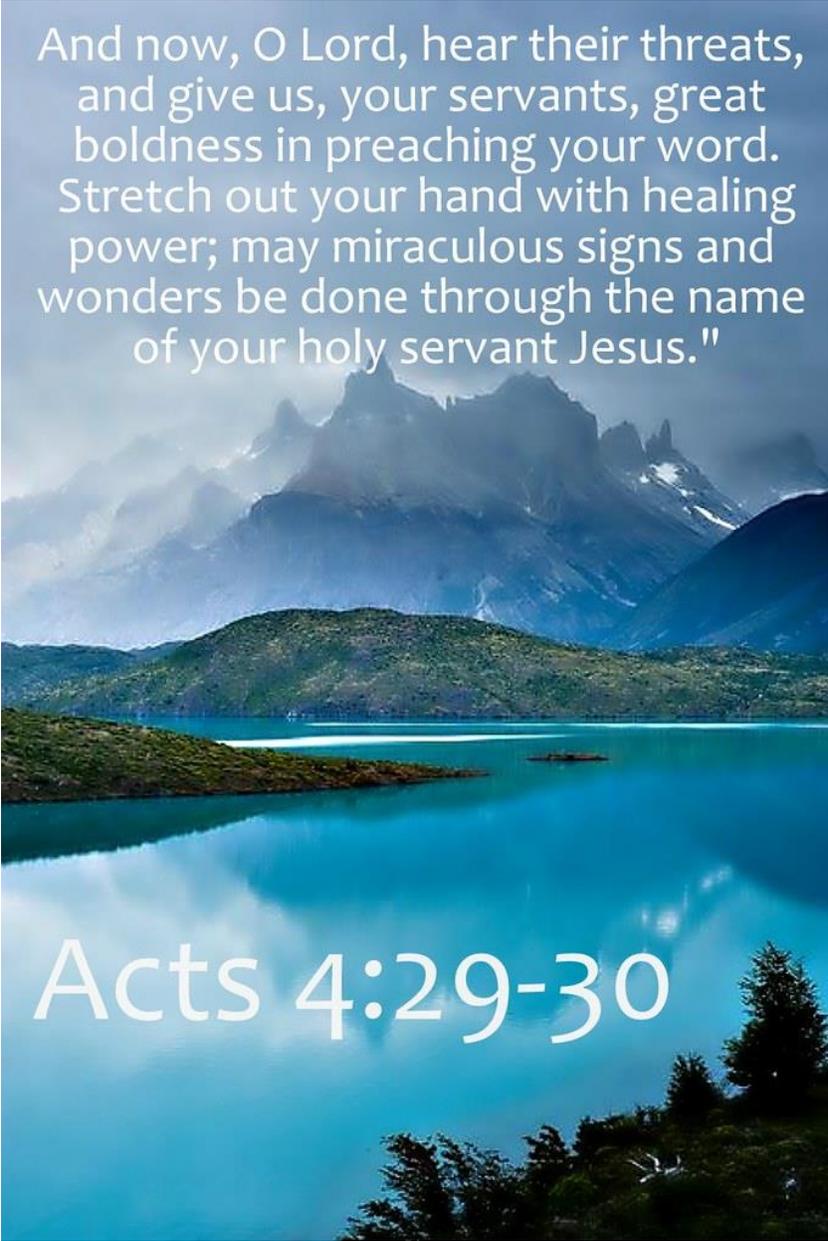


They started their prayer by recognizing who is the Lord. They addressed God as the Sovereign Lord. God has absolute authority and is ruler with unchallengeable power. If you believe that, then why would you have a fear of people and their opinion of you?

We read in the Bible that the apostles were still afraid even after the resurrection. After Pentecost, though we never read about Christians being afraid. In fact, they rejoiced in being considered worthy of suffering for their faith in Christ Jesus.

Jesus is our Master and Lord. Jesus stated very clearly: "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation." (Mark 16:15). To whom are we listening or submitting when we fail to do that?

The believers recognized God is God. He is their boss above all. Then they quoted Psalm 2. They had the Bible in their hearts and minds. When they prayed they were able to prayer through the Scriptures. Their prayer had three points:



And now, O Lord, hear their threats,
and give us, your servants, great
boldness in preaching your word.
Stretch out your hand with healing
power; may miraculous signs and
wonders be done through the name
of your holy servant Jesus."

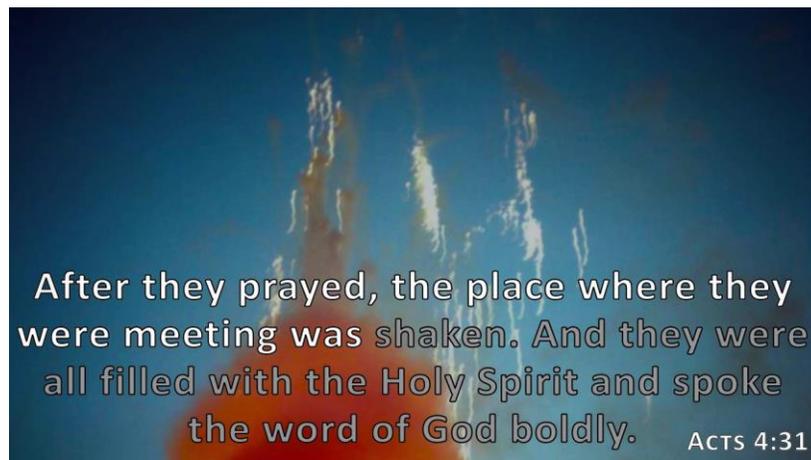
Acts 4:29-30

1. They clearly stated the situation. God, consider their threats. It was not a prayer that their threats would fall under divine judgment. It was not a prayer that the church would have peace and safety. They merely stated the reality of the situation full of confidence in God's power to take care of things. They only wanted God consider the threats.

2. They asked that God would enable God's lowly servants – slaves – to speak His word with great boldness.

Holy boldness is not human courage. It is not innate courage. You cannot be convinced that Jesus Christ came out of that grave and that he's the only hope of a sin-cursed world and be silent. You cannot. You might as well tell the sun to cease to shine as to tell a Christian who has had an encounter with the living Christ to be quiet. Holy boldness comes from remembering who God is and to whom you belong. It comes from a heart bubbling over with excitement about what God has done through Jesus Christ.

3. The third prayer was that God would stretch out his hand to heal and to perform miraculous signs and wonders in and through the name of Jesus. They prayed that God would be present and helping through His Spirit for people to believe.



I love what happened after their prayer: The place where they were gathered was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking God's word with confidence.

Didn't we hear this already? Just recently the disciples on Pentecost were filled with the Holy Spirit. Did they manage to lose the power so fast? I love that they were filled again with the Spirit. I do not think they lost the Holy Spirit. I believe that the Holy Spirit lives in every Christian.

Jesus told Nicodemus that God's Spirit is like the wind. You don't know when it will come, where it comes from or where it is going. The Holy Spirit is unpredictable. Sometimes there is a mighty display of power and other times the Holy Spirit is quietly working in lives bring transformation much like yeast changing bread dough.

Our responsibility is to be constant in prayer so that we can align our wills with God's will and then to obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Peter and John got together with other believers and did what we should always do. They prayed.

One thing that I notice is that the Christians were not in a happy place. They were not afraid of the authorities. Yes, they were being persecuted and threatened. This did

not bother them. They did not pray for God to take the problems away. They prayed for boldness. They did not need to pray for guidance. They already knew what they were supposed to be doing. They prayed for God to continue showing God's power in the name of Jesus.

Could it be that we do not experience the power of the Holy Spirit because we are focused on our comfort, financial security and avoiding problems instead desiring God to stretch out his arm with miraculous signs?

We wonder why we never experience the Holy Spirit when we are not willing to get out of our box for Jesus.

What matters more than anything else in all the world is that all honor, glory, praise be given to Jesus. It was then that the Holy Spirit chose to manifest power.

John 16:14 tells us that one of the primary roles of the Holy Spirit is bring glory to Jesus.



A husband and wife were in their sixties. They were getting ready to celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. The wife loved antiques so the husband bought a beautiful old brass oil lamp as a gift. When she unwrapped it, a genie appeared. He thanked them and gave each of them one wish. The wife wished for an all-expenses paid, first class, around the world cruise with her husband. Instantly she was presented with tickets for the entire journey, plus expensive side trips, dinners, and funds for shopping. The husband, however, wished he had a female companion who was 30 years younger. Instantly he turned 93 years' old

Third person of the Trinity is not a genie from a magical lamp that serves you to satisfy your worldly desires. The Holy Spirit is not here to give you a wonderful feeling or even to give any sort of theological proof. There is no formula or magical trick to invoke the Holy Spirit. There is no Holy hardware to polish. You do not force the Holy Spirit by working extra hard at prayer, fasting, going to church, Scripture reading or any other discipline.

As Christians we die to self and we are raised with Christ who is in control of our lives. We respond to the Holy Spirit by choosing to believe, to obey and to share the good news of Jesus and His love. We pray for God's ways, God's kingdom and how we can best be the instruments for His honor. What if we would pray, "God lead me to people so I can share the gospel. God help me to make friends so I can share your grace. God, give me words." Let us pray as the disciples prayed: "Give us courage and help us to share boldly our faith in Jesus."