

Message Date: 07-12-20

To the Ends of the Earth- ACTS Part 2: What Only God Can Do

Message Title: Week 5, Shaken

– What influences how you pray?

- **What are the things that influence what you pray FOR?**
 - **Might be your upbringing- what you were taught, church/family culture**
 - **Maybe specific prayers you learned, you recited- how heard others pray**
 - **Maybe, although less common, how you pray is actually shaped by the teaching of scripture, pattern of prayer we see in the old and new testament**

- **Most likely, however, for people that pray at all, the greatest influence on HOW WE PRAY is our CIRCUMSTANCE. What's happening in our life RIGHT NOW. Our Issues and Needs. This is the dominant understanding and practice of prayer in most churches.**

- **This is completely understandable, because for most Christians, our dominant concept of Gods' purpose and role in our lives is to help us with our issues and respond to our needs, as we see them and present them to God.**

- **Of course, we believe that God sent Christ for the purpose of the Cross, that though faith in Christ- in His Name- we might receive forgiveness and be spiritually reborn into a new life... with a new source of life, and the CERTAIN HOPE of eternity. AMEN!**

- **BUT... when it comes to how God relates to us in this life we are in, RIGHT NOW, it is so easy- and so common- for our primary focus to be OURSELVES, what we want God to do, and how we ask and expect Him to meet our NEEDS.**

- **With this dominant perspective, it's no surprise that a create source of confusion and angst within Christianity is how we understand God when bad things happen to good, godly, Christian people! When hardship and uncertainty don't go away even though we sincerely pray for God to deliver us, and then we wonder why God didn't hear or answer our prayers.**

- **This isn't just true of Christianity. Virtually every faith system in history has at its core the notion that if we worship God, do the religious requirements, and obey him to a reasonable extent, that he will provide for our needs, help us with our issues, and protect us from our enemies.**

- **AND, we can see in history times when religious cultures- including Christian cultures- experienced great theological confusion and distress because large scale tragedy suddenly befell their people. Could have been foreign invaders, or epidemic disease- the result was an existential crisis regarding their faith in their God. WHY**
 - **Again, the idea was that for a faithful and religious country, their God was supposed to protect them from such tragedies! That's the bargain! And when tragedy and hardship comes, then where is our God? What did we miss? What are we doing wrong? GOD, WHY AREN'T YOU HELPING US**

- **CONTRASTED TO THIS is the response of prayer we see in the original community of Christ Followers, when they are first subjected to resistance, repression, and what would very soon become outright persecution.**

- **THINK OF WHERE WE ARE IN OUR STORY IN ACTS ... what has happened**
 - **Past months- time since resurrection- have been a wild and miraculous ride**
 - **It turns out Christ wasn't dead, He was risen from the dead**
 - **Miracle of Pentecost... Holy Spirit speaking through all the believers, witnessed by thousands, thousands respond in faith**
 - **God has been working through apostles in miraculous ways, people are rejoicing and praising God, incredible dynamic of the community of believers, everyone is provided for, and the community is growing every day!**
- **THINGS ARE GOING WELL! God is being Glorified! THEN... BOOM!**
- **Resistance. Threats. Intimidation. Peter and John thrown in jail and put on trial.**
- **Highest authority of your people demands you cease and desist... barely veiled threat... Listen! We had Jesus put to death, don't think we can't do the same to you..**
- **Faced with this sudden and severe opposition when everything was going so well, what would you do? More importantly, HOW WOULD YOU PRAY?**
- **Looking back with our 21st century perspective- if we were to represent a typical cross-section of evangelical Christianity today, AND we were in that situation, ALMOST CERTAINLY we would be praying for the resistance to cease. For God to protect us from our enemies, deliver us from persecution, and make the hardship stop so the amazing things that were happening could keep on happening.**
- **THIS IS PRECISELY HOW THE BELIEVERS in ACTS 4 DID NOT PRAY.**
- **This brings us to our text today, which is Acts 4:13-31. But First, THANK YOU for joining in today, I'm pastor Ethan Moore, it is Sunday July the 12th, and this is TRINITY ONLINE.**

– **READ SCRIPTURE- SERVICE**
 – **Online- Prayer, scripture reading,**

- **So, if you are joining us for the first time or have missed a week, here's where we are in the story of Acts**
 - **Setting is Jerusalem, we are in opening months of this new movement of Christ followers. Miraculous day of Pentecost is very recent event**
 - **God uses Peter and John to bring healing to a man begging at the temple gates- a man crippled from birth**
 - **The crowds on the temple mount are amazed, and Peter takes the opportunity to preach his second major sermon, connecting everything that has happened back to Jesus and His resurrection**
 - **Finally, the authorities have had enough. Peter and John are arrested, thrown in Jail overnight, and the next morning brought before the Sanhedrin, Judaism's highest civil and religious authority. After a very awkward experience for the Sanhedrin, in which Peter and John showed incredible courage and boldness, these chief priests and elders threatened Peter and John, demanded they stop speaking about Jesus, and then after further threats and intimidation, decided to let them go.**
- **This brings us to the passage we just read, starting with Acts 4:13.. and here we see how the apostles, and the broader gathering of believers, responded to these new threats and intimidation. We see HOW THEY PRAYED. LETS WALK THROUGH THIS.**
- **First, might seem like a small point, but...**

✠ These first followers of Christ faced the coming persecution as a COMMUNITY.

23-24a *On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people (companions/friends) 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.*

- **The believers met together continuously. They prayed together. Worshiped together. Ate together. Encouraged together. Everything that has happened to the believers since the Resurrection of Jesus has happened in the context of a community of mutually supportive friends. This is another example of how central and essential is the community of faith. It is God's plan that we EXPERIENCE his presence- and his work through us, in community. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12, YOU ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST, and each of you is a part of it!**
- **NIV says they raised their 'voices', but Greek is singular 'VOICE'. This emphasizes the 'oneness', the unity that existing among these believers as together they sought God in prayer. They recognized that apart from God they did not have the strength to face what was coming, and their prayer is an expression of dependence upon God. AND SO...**

✠ As the believers prayed, they began by confessing the certain hope of God's SOVEREIGNTY.

"Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.

- **"SOVEREIGN LORD"... very strong phrase. It is a statement that God is the master of everything, he has been, he is, and he will be completely and ultimately in control. They confess that God is creator of everything, therefore he is able to be OVER everything. The word LORD also gets personal- because God is the sovereign master of all creation, that means he is MY Lord- and that is GOOD, because HE IS GOOD.**
- **Consistent with God being sovereign...**

✠ They recognized that the presence of hardship and persecution was part of God's PLAN.

²⁵ *You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: **Here quotes from Psalm 2** "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.*

- **For the people of Israel, Psalm 2 was an honest cry out to God because of the opposition they had faced from their enemies- the surrounding nations- for all of their history. GOD! Why does this keep happening! Why do the nations rage against us!**
- **But this is also a confession of hope that the plots against Israel will always be in vain, because God is sovereign! Statement of hope that God- and God's people- will always prevail.**
- **The psalm goes on to say that this opposition will continue, that the kings and rulers of the earth will come against the Lord and his anointed one- His messiah, when he comes.**
- **Think what this Psalm meant to the disciples – They too are asking... GOD! Why is this happening? Why are people coming against what you are doing?**
- **And here the disciples are including their own people, along with the surrounding gentile nations, as those that are rejecting and fighting against what God is doing. At the same time, they also are proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah and their HOPE that the resistance against Jesus will be in vain.**

- **Even more, even though they don't understand what is happening, or why it is happening, they know that none of this is a surprise to God. God is in control, and all of the unfolding events are part of God's plan and purpose**

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.

- **BOCK observes that in this light, the opposition of the Sanhedrin is almost meaningless. Yes, they can make threats, and as we will see, they can carry through on those threats. But if the disciples believed that ALL of this was God's plan and purpose, then the resistance and persecution of the authorities was not something to be feared, but evidence that they- the disciples- are joined together with God IN his plans and purposes. In the midst of their hardship, God wasn't abandoning them, He was choosing to work THROUGH THEM.**
- **With that being the case, HOW COULD they pray for God to stop what was happening- and they didn't. Instead...**

✠ They prayed for **BOLDNESS** to join God in the work of His Kingdom.

²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

- **This perspective- the disciples prayer for boldness- cannot be understated in its importance- both to them, and to us today.**
- **Think with me- why did Jesus come? Why did the incarnation happen, the cross, resurrection, ascension of Jesus... Why did this all happen?**
- **From our highly individualistic modern/postmodern perspective, honest- we would say "Jesus came and did what he did so that through MY faith in him, MY sins could be forgiven, I will go to heaven when I did, and until then, right now, God is with me to encourage me, help me with my issues, and meet my needs. At least that is the basis of how I pray.**
- **HERE'S THE DEAL! IT IS TRUE that In Christ we have received forgiveness and the hope of eternity. It is ALSO true that our only hope for true freedom from the brokenness of this life is found In Christ.**
- **BUT CHURCH! WE NEED TO HEAR from this passage, this story! Even though what Christ did has brought salvation and new life to ME (and to you as a believer)..... WHAT CHRIST DID, WHAT HE IS DOING NOW, IS NOT ABOUT ME, nor about you.**
- **The reason Christ came is to bring about HIS KINGDOM. The Kingdom, which IN CHRIST we have become an integral part. YOU SEE, God's purpose in everything He does is the purpose of His kingdom—His work of brining restoration and redemption back to His creation.**
- **AND, HIS PLAN to do this by working through that part of His creation that he has ALREADY RESTORED AND REDEEMED. US! His church. His disciples. His body in the world.**

- *In last verse of Ephesians 1, Paul describes the purpose of the church- all of us as a community of faith, in this way...*

Ephesians 1:22 And God placed all things under Christ's feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

- ***YOU SEE... so often we think of our faith as inviting Christ into OUR WORLD, but that is flying upside down! The reality is that God has invited us into HIS WORLD, HIS purposes, HIS kingdom.***
- ***This first generation of believers understood this, and it was foundational to their very identity as a community. The result is that their PRAYER was NOT for God to make their hardship go away, but to equip and enable them to BOLDY be a part of what God was doing. This is to be a witness to the person, the goodness, the gospel, of Jesus.***
- ***And so... this perspective led to the last part of their prayer, as they...***

✠ They prayed for God to do what ONLY God can do.

³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

- ***This prayer further reveals the God-centered/ kingdom centered perspective these first disciples had. NO QUESTION that the healings, miracles that were happening benefited the people they happened to. BUT THE PRIMARY PURPOSE of these miracles was not to meet the needs of the sick people of Jerusalem. IT WAS TO REVEAL, to authenticate and demonstrate that Jesus is the messiah! You see...***

The disciples prayed for a miracle, but not for a miracle of deliverance. They prayed for a miracle of FURTHERANCE.

- ***They prayed that God would do what ONLY God could do, so that HIS NAME, HIS KINGDOM would grow, that people would come to know the ultimate healing that comes through faith in Christ.***

✠ God ANSWERED their prayer!

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.

- ***When we pray according to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, with our focus upon God, His Kingdom, and our hearts desiring that God would give us His strength, courage, and equipping to join Him in his work of bringing redemption and restoration to this world... TO work through us where we are, who we are, RIGHT NOW, IN THE MIDST OF LIFE AS IT REALLY IS.... THAT IS A PRAYER that is in the heart of God to answer.***

Takeaways

- ***What have we seen here.***

✠ It is both tempting and easy for our prayer lives to be all about US. But faced with the hardship and threat of persecution, these believers prayers were all about GOD.

- ***Who God is, what he has done, and their request to join God in what he was doing.***

✠ In this time of uncertainty and hardship, how does the Acts believer's prayer teach us to pray?

- To pray with thanksgiving that God is Sovereign.
 - *In our flesh, we want to be in charge.. we chafe at the idea that God is God and we are not...but friends, the reality that God IS Sovereign, that nothing surprises him, escapes him, or is outside his control or plan... THAT IS SOURCE OF INCREDIBLE HOPE AND PEACE...because not only is God Sovereign, but HE IS GOOD*
- To pray for trust and understanding that God is always working out His plan.
 - *Even when things are happening that we don't understand, or that are difficult for us... God's plan is intact. God's work is intact. We should be encouraged by this.*
- To pray for courage and boldness to join God in His work, where we are right now.
 - *Bottom line, this is a prayer for God to open our eyes so that we see our lives, and the events of our world, through the lens of God's purposes, not the lens of our needs.*
 - *HEAR! God cares about our needs. He does. In fact, in Matthew six, Jesus ensures his followers that God already knows their needs... then he tells them that rather than giving their attention to worry, to SEEK FIRST his Kingdom, and His righteousness.*
 - *May we pray that God will give us hearts of courage- not just to withstand the difficulty of life- we definitely pray for that- but to have the courage and boldness to be a witness to God's goodness, and to the NEW life that Jesus brings.*
- To pray for God to work!
 - *In our families... in our church... our community.... May we pray for God to do what only God can do.*
 - *Raise up people for work of his ministry*
 - *Soften our hearts to love one another*
 - *That God would bring about reconciliation in our country- that as believers we would be agents of that healing and reconciliation, not the opposite.*
 - *That God would draw people to himself, give people a thirst and hunger for his presence and his word*
 - *THAT GOD WOULD WORK to renew within His Church the perspective of life that is centered on HIM. This is a perspective that will change how we pray*