

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

Praying with Confidence

Acts 4:23-31

January 13, 2019

Main Point

Many of us struggle to know what to pray. What assurance do we have that what we are praying is consistent with God's will? Our passage today is a vivid reminder that confidence in prayer comes when we pray in alignment with who God is and what He says in His word.

Getting Started

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is the biggest answer to prayer you've personally experienced? What did that answer do for your prayer life? for your faith?

Why don't you pray more than you do?

How would praying more impact you? Our group? Our church? Our community?

When we work, we work; when we pray, God works. Too many believers—and churches—have lost dependence on God. Do we not believe God can work as He did in the days of the early church? In Acts, believers boldly prayed as they faced persecution while sharing the gospel. And as God performed His wonders with the early church, He will do it for us.

Observation

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Have a volunteer read Acts 4:23-28.

Peter and John returned after they were released from jail to the other apostles, friends, and relatives who encouraged and supported them during this difficulty. Once there, they reported the events that just transpired, telling how authorities had ordered them not to preach of Jesus again.

Who do you go to when you experience difficulty? What is significant about the people to whom Peter and John went after their release?

What is typically your first response to a crisis situation? Is your response like the one described in the Scripture passage or would it be different? Why?

The believers acknowledged in their prayer that Jesus knew what it meant to experience every possible form of opposition that could be experienced. How does knowing that encourage you today?

What parallel does this prayer reveal between the experiences of Peter and John and that of Jesus?

How can this understanding impact your prayer life?

Rather than despondency and defeat or fear and anxiety over such dire news, the assembled believers turned to God in prayer, not as a last resort but as a first resolve. Surprisingly, the believers didn't pray for changed circumstances or personal comfort. They instead turned to God, recognizing His power and sovereignty.

Have a volunteer read Acts 4:29-30.

Why would the believers have called themselves "slaves" in their prayer? What's the implication for us as believers today?

What does complete boldness look like? Who do you know that most closely fits this description? How do you think they became that way?

Having embraced God's plan in their prayer, the believers now requested God to perform a great and visible work. They asked that God would consider the threats from their opposition, give them boldness in witnessing, and show miracles in answer to their prayer. God's will might not remove us from difficult situations; but when we pray, God will strengthen us and make us more effective for Him in those situations.

Have a volunteer read Acts 4:31.

What was the direct result of prayer in this verse?

How do you feel about your own prayers considering this verse? Why do you think our prayers often have less of an impact as what we see in this verse?

Besides sharing our faith with others, in what situations might we act boldly for God?

Because of the infilling with the Holy Spirit, the disciples began to speak God's message with boldness. Their motivation originates from the indwelling Holy Spirit's power and presence. Christians overflowing with the Holy Spirit share the gospel.

In fact, one filled with the Spirit declares the gospel boldly. Isn't that what we want? Courage? Boldness? Living obediently to Christ? Dependent prayer fosters such a transformation.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

We may not vocalize our doubts on God's powerful ability to answer our prayers, but specifically how do we sometimes see ourselves doubting God's ability? How do such doubts hinder our prayer lives?

How can you plan for opportunities to share God's message? How does a person witness with complete boldness? What practical step can you take today?

How can praying together as a group of believers, such as our group, transform our church?

Prayer

Pray that God would help us pray big and bold prayers for ourselves and our church. Lift up prayers that are both big and specific. Ask that the Holy Spirit would give us boldness in sharing God's message of hope, even in the face of opposition.

Commentary

The beginning of Acts 4 recalls Peter and John's imprisonment for boldly proclaiming the gospel. After their release, Peter and John went to their own people and reported everything that had happened to them. The Sanhedrin had threatened them, but they had refused to stop preaching and teaching in Jesus' name.

The news of Peter and John's experience moved the church to pray. This growing but struggling church embraced God's plan for them in spreading the gospel in a hostile environment. God's authority is absolute. The argument of these believers is sound and uses a greater to lesser principle: If God created everything in this vast universe, then He certainly has authority over the circumstances we face as believers.

The connection between God as Creator and His control of His world is made in the quotation of Psalm 2:1-2. David, the author of this psalm, faced opposition to his reign from pagan rulers and his own countrymen. Similarly, Jesus, the greater Son of David, also faced opposition from people in authority. This Messianic psalm refers to the fact that those faithful to King Jesus can expect the same opposition.

The kings of the earth took their stand and the rulers assembled together against the Lord and against His Messiah. Their rejection of the gospel means that eternal punishment awaits them. Peter and John told the Sanhedrin the truth; the Jewish leaders rejected their message to their own peril. Despite the guilt of these men in putting Jesus to death, it was God's sovereign plan for the redemption of people. God's people today have a part in that plan as we share the gospel and watch God continue to grow His church.

Christ's followers called on God to use them to advance His kingdom amid this opposition. Christians in many countries are familiar with hostile governments, and this was the case for the early church from the very outset. The believers did not ask God to remove persecution but to empower them to proclaim the gospel boldly despite persecution. They were more concerned about advancing the gospel and God's kingdom than they were about avoiding persecution.

Through this prayer, these believers serve as a reminder for us that God does not call us to lives of ease, prosperity, and comfort. One of the most dangerous ideas propagated in modern churches today is that God's plan is for His people to be happy and prosperous. The Scriptures do not support this claim. The believers in the early church already knew this and prayed accordingly. They wanted God to use them to spread the gospel in the face of persecution, even if it led to their martyrdom.

After the church had finished praying, the Holy Spirit moved in a powerful way. God had a specific plan for the church at that time, and the Holy Spirit gave them the power to accomplish that plan. God never demands of us what He doesn't empower us to do. The church had been praying that God would continue to use them, and we should expect God to move when we pray according to His will. The church's prayer was answered—they had asked for boldness (v. 29) and now they had the boldness they needed to be effective witnesses (v. 31). The early church was willing to boldly go where no Christians had gone before—because they had the power of the Spirit in them and a powerful message to share with others.

Adapted from www.smallgroup.com.