

## **Boldness**

### **Bold Prophecy**

The second half of Acts 4 is a buffet of rich Gospel meat. Both Paul in 1 Corinthians (3:2) and the writer of Hebrews in chapter 5 (vs. 12-13) tells us that there is the milk of the Word to feed the new Christians and then there is solid food or the meat of the Word for those maturing in God's Word and their faith. Today, we are about feast on T-bone steak of the Gospel. I am not a vegetarian and relate to Paul's analogy of milk and solid food or meat because I love a good steak. If you are a vegetarian, I do not want to offend you, but you will need to substitute something with Gospel building protein – maybe, bean curd.

The Early Church is now under growing pressure. As the pressure builds people can choose 2 paths; *one can let the pressure grind them into dust or the pressure can harden them into diamonds precious for the kingdom of God.* The threats are growing and are moving to becoming persecution. Peter and John were threatened by the Jewish leaders concerned about their own power and control, they told the Apostles not to preach or teach anymore in the name of Jesus or else suffer the consequences. As I thought about this passage, I had to ask God to help strengthen my faith when confronted with threats for preaching the Gospel. If it ever came between my life and the Gospel, I will need Holy Spirit empowered faith. I have experienced life-threatening persecution overseas; 3 times men came to take my life and the Lord sustained me and He bolstered my faith and miraculously saved me. So, by experience, I can assure you - you will need Divine

help to boldly go forth with the Gospel in the face of persecution and this happens when we fully surrender the control of our lives to the Holy Spirit. Will we, you and me, have the strength of Stephen when persecution comes? How will we respond and what will we do? The question is - will we be bold for the Gospel or be like John Mark? Paul and Barnabas traveled to Cyprus as recorded in Acts 13 and brought John Mark along with them as an assistant. (Acts 13:1-5) But somewhere along the way, John Mark decides that he's had enough. After sailing to Perga the Book of Acts tells us matter-of-factly that John Mark left them there and returned to Jerusalem. (v. 13). Essentially, he quit when the going got rough. As we studied last week God gives His children His Whole Armor so they can be active in the battle of good vs. evil. We are to never quit, never give up and never surrender.

Some studies have estimate approximately 90,000 Christians die every year or over 346 per day or 1 every 6 minutes because of the Gospel message they live and teach and refuse to deny. The choice is clear; if one gives into the world to save their mortal life they are spiritually ground into dust or if one is faithful to God they are transformed into a diamond shining forth for His kingdom and are have salvation of their eternal soul. My beloved, we must preach the truth of God and Jesus as the Christ and know the world will oppose us because the evil one hates everything of God. If one is a child of God the evil one and the world will hate you. As a child of God, you will be in the battle, so put on the whole armor of God.

These believers in the Book of Acts are ready. They are not willing to sit back and hide while they are threatened but are empowered by the Spirit for bold Gospel proclamation. Part of their boldness comes, as I just mentioned by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but not just the Spirit's indwelling, but surrendering their lives to the Spirit and believing in being a sacrifice for the Kingdom. God's

Kingdom is far more important than an individual. These early believer's boldness springs forth from their understanding of God's complete sovereignty in all things, even in their current situation and persecution.

There are a few reasons why I say this, we will look at a few, but one I want to start with, is Psalm 2 that Peter quotes. Peter handles correctly the Old Testament and Luke shows the readers of Acts that the Apostles understood what God proclaimed through David and foretold the very events they are currently experiencing. If God speaks the future through the scriptures 100's of years before these events happened, then the Apostles and believers rightly conclude, God's perfect plan is coming to pass. The Early Church perceives the persecution and threats of the Jewish leaders as the fulfillment of Psalm 2. Their reasoning is inspired by God through David, <sup>1</sup> [“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? <sup>2</sup> The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, David quotes the prophet Jeremiah \(5:5\), <sup>3</sup> ‘Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.’”](#) (Psalm 2:1-3) The connection Peter makes with David is straightforward. David wrote about God's Messiah and His people being plotted against. Since Jesus is God's Messiah and since they are God's children through Christ and since they are currently suffering persecution, they rightly conclude that David wrote about Jesus and about them. The nation's leaders desire control and power for themselves but the schemes against God will not last, and by God's power, His anointed will break the cords of the world's leaders which bind people to the world and evil one. Jesus came and the cords of death were broken and the cords of the evil one that bind people have begun to be unraveled. So, Psalm 2 is a wonderful example of Scripture's dual prophecy; fulfillment at the time of David and fulfillment in the future.

**Immediate Fulfillment:** David began Psalm 2 with a rhetorical question, why do the nations of the world and their rulers make a hopeless attack on the Lord and His anointed King? Continuing at verse 4, “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. <sup>5</sup> Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, <sup>6</sup> ‘As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.’” The situation is that the rulers are subject to the Lord and King, yet they are trying in vain to gain power and control. The psalmist comments that God reacts with scornful laughter to their puny efforts and with anger at their disobedience.

**Future Fulfillment:** Ultimately, the Holy Spirit had in mind Jesus as God’s anointed Messiah. Reading Psalm 2, verse 7, “I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you.’” We observe this fulfilled at Jesus’ baptism recorded in the Gospel Accounts and Luke writes of Psalm 2’s fulfillment in Acts chapter 13, <sup>32</sup> “And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, <sup>33</sup> this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’” The Apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit interpret Psalm 2 to be a Messianic Psalm and since Jesus is the Messiah, they interpret it in light of Jesus and their immediate context which is fulfillment of the prophecy given to David. This point is important especially in light of what they say to God in their prayer for boldness.

Let us break here in our study of God’s Word for prayer – a prayer for boldness.

Overarching Theme of Acts 4:23-31 is; ***The early church prayed for boldness while in the midst of God ordained persecution.*** This makes clear that unless one is divinely empowered with boldness, when they face resistance and

persecution under their own power, they will deny the Lord or be ashamed of the Gospel, they may cower in fear of man and if they continue with presenting the Gospel - it will be watered down to please mankind. It is the same for us. This passage teaches believers, you and me, need to submit our lives to God and be empowered with boldness by His Spirit to faithfully share the Gospel of Christ with the lost. If not, we will become like many who call themselves Christian but embrace the world.

### **Bold Word**

I believe Acts to be God's divine Word for us today. We live in a day when it seems that the endorsing of sin is growing at an alarming rate. There are government scandals everywhere you look. Corporations are exposed for corruption at the expense of their employees and customers. Predators harming people, especially women and children and the world sits and watches and failed to protect the innocent. The world promotes good as evil and evil as good.

Open your Bible and follow me as I read beginning at Acts chapter 4, verse 23, “When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.<sup>24</sup> And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, ‘Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,<sup>25</sup> who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, “Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain?<sup>26</sup> The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed””” (Psalm 2:1-2) The World opposes everything of God and He calls us, His children to stand for right and share the Gospel of eternal truth.

Living in a world of instantaneous news; with each news source in competition with the others for advertising revenue, they no longer report the facts but telling us what to think, it is not hard to grasp that not only governments are scheming against each other but so are news outlets. Each spending lies in an effort for control, power and money. It is also not hard to observe many of these schemes backfiring as time exposes the truth, for God's truth is not the propositional truth of the world or an ever-evolving truth as seen in Islam, Mormonism and other man-made religions, but His truth is never changing and eternal. These governments schemes are like Don Quixote charging the windmill. As Psalm 2, verse 4 tells us God is in heaven and He laughs at their efforts, for their efforts serve the evil one and all who seek their own fame through the world will fail, all these plans and people will ultimately be ground into dust. What is also important to understand is all of this serves to fulfill God's plan.

Notice with me that all of the disciples are in complete agreement theologically with the interpretation of their current events. First, they recognize that God is truly the Creator. God has made everything. This carries a great deal of weight when believers are suffering. God made everything; therefore, it stands to reason that if God can speak everything into existence out of nothing, then there is no doubt, He controls all that He created. Remember Nebuchadnezzar rebellion against God? He was made to be like a wild animal grazing in the fields, but after 7 years God restored Nebuchadnezzar's sanity and he lifted his eyes to heaven and said to God, <sup>34</sup>“I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; <sup>35</sup> all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you

done?” (Daniel 4:34-35) God allows man to rebel up to a point but God will not allow anything to get in the way of His plan being fulfilled.

Peter and the followers respond to the evil power-hungry leaders by addressing God, <sup>24</sup> “... they lifted their voices together to God and said, “**Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them ...**” When the Apostles address God by faith as “**Sovereign Lord**” one would expect something amazing in response from God. The title of “**Sovereign Lord**” means God is Master over absolutely everything for He created - absolutely everything. My Beloved, sovereignty and Creator go together. God is Creator and He is in charge of His creation or Master or Sovereign. If this world is the product of evolution, then we do not have a Sovereign God. Or it works the other way also, if God is not Sovereign then He also is not the Creator. Both sink or swim together.

The disciples understand their situation, namely, the beginning of extreme persecution, remember that in a couple of chapters, Steven will be stoned and they conclude that because God is Sovereign, all things absolutely all are under His control, even their trials and our trials. Because of this accurate assessment, they can be bold because this current persecution is an empty attempt by the Jewish leaders to thwart God’s plan and even though the persecution is serious and scary from a human perspective, God laughs at the ineffective attempts of His enemies.

The Apostles were seeing their trouble through the lens of theological truth and they relied on God’s power, they no longer see events through the lens of human perception and human power. What lens do we see the world through, God’s or mans? These, believers were bold because they understood from the Scriptures that all the planning and plotting from God’s enemies would amount to nothing. All these threats and persecution would not stop their evangelism and the

Gospel from spreading to the hearts of people. God will be victorious and because they belong to God, they too, will be victorious even if that means they lose their mortal lives. They understood that if they lost their lives serving the One true God, they would be with Him in heaven forever.

## **Bold Plan**

The disciples could be bold because they had already observed how Jesus experienced the best attempts of Satan, Herod, Pilate, the Jews and the Romans to defeat God. These vain attempts ended up not stopping God's plan but actually carrying it out. Again, look in your Bible as we continuing at verse 27 of Acts chapter 4, "for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,<sup>28</sup> to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." We can understand, like these believers why God laughs, their efforts result in eternal lost and do nothing to prevent God's plan from being fulfilled. Whatever sinful men do to try and hinder God's plan and move their agenda forward, in reality their schemes only move God's plan forward. Their scheming only proved to all with eyes to see and ears to hear and souls that had been brought alive by God's grace that Jesus was the Christ and resulted in a risen and exalted Savior. From this, we too, learn that we can be bold in the face of opposition because their best plotting and scheming really carries out God's purposes. If we believe we truly belong to God and not the world, what can the world do to harm us? As King David came to understand after many trials, he self-inflicted and persecution from enemies,<sup>9</sup> "Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place — the Most High, who is my refuge—<sup>10</sup> no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent." (Psalm 91:9-10) The Apostle Paul made clear the result of true faith in the face of persecution, writing,<sup>37</sup> "No, in all these

things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:37-39) For believers the world has no lasting power over us, it only can persecute us in this life.

Let's return to the fulfilled prophecy of Psalm 2, verse 2 found in Acts 4:26, “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed”. The Apostles connect this Psalm about Jesus being God's Anointed and fit the pieces together. They remember that Herod, the king and Pontius Pilate the rulers who were enemies and how they took counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed. They also remember how the people were also involved. The Gentiles crucified Jesus but it was Israel that plotted and schemed to bring it about. The Apostles and believers witnessed these events firsthand and they also saw the results of these wicked efforts, reading at verse 27, “for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup> **to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.**” Jesus was crucified by God's enemies as Isaiah foretold, <sup>8</sup> “By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? <sup>9</sup> And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. <sup>10</sup> **Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him ...**” (Isaiah 53:8-10) The result of men's evil efforts and schemes was that they were in fact carrying out God's plan.

Take notice in verse 28, the Apostles recognize God's power, "to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." Since God always wins and since His enemies' plot and scheme in vain, and since even in the account of the crucifixion when things seemed like they were going exactly as the evil one planned, the reality was evil men were doing as exactly as God had planned. My beloved, should not this encourage us to be bold in the midst of this evil world – for we know everything is going exactly as God has planned.

### **Bold Prayer**

My final point is taken from verses 29 to 31, "And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness,"<sup>30</sup> while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."<sup>31</sup> And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."

To begin with, I find it a little out of place that the disciples did not pray for the persecution to end. From a human standpoint it is odd that they do not pray for it to stop so they can live without persecution. It says that they were all praying in one voice, literally, in complete agreement. So, what we see is all were praying for the same thing, across the board with no exceptions. The world wants to persecute us but their persecution makes us stronger, bolder, more determined and more dependent upon the Lord. The Apostles and believers ask God to grant them boldness so they can continue to proclaim the Gospel in the midst of persecuting unbelievers. They are saying, Lord, the same people who opposed and killed Jesus are opposing us - make us even bolder. Should this not be our prayer also?

Luke clarifies what these Christians understood –

- God is sovereign. Everything works according to the counsel of His will.
- The present persecution is taking place because everything works according to God's predestined plan, then this persecution must be included in God's plan.
- They saw how the same people before resisted God in killing His Son and yet, it was what brought God's plan to completion.
- Because this present persecution is God's will, because it is happening, then they will not pray for the persecution to end. They pray instead that God would make them bolder in preaching Christ.

Our modern thinking might conclude; this is not an easy way to live. Therefore, it is not God's will because God wants us comfortable or God should make the mean people go away or He should the change mean people to nice people because God wants His children to be comfortable. Does this worldly view not sound like a growing number of churches? It is wrong we are in battle for the souls of those God calls. God does not need us to fulfill His plan but He gives us the honor of doing battle for His glory and Kingdom!

Peter's greatest fear was not those making threats but that he would deny his Lord again. So, we should be praying to God to increase our faith, embolden us to preach Your Gospel in its pure truth and yet, with love and grace. We should pray God fills us evermore and increasingly with the Holy Spirit and the Spirit would help us arm for battle and ready to fight.

Perhaps, at least some of our prayers need to be prayed in light of God's sovereignty as the Creator who governs the universe by the power of His right hand. Perhaps, instead of praying for the bad situation to go away, we should pray that the Gospel would go forth and we would be bold in our evangelism. Let us take time to evaluate how and why we are praying. We need to seek God so that we would pray prayers that are in-line with God's plan and not our own. This will take real repentance and commitment and effort. My beloved, prepare for battle on God's terms, for the fulfillment of His plan as the servants of the most Holy God. Amen!