

The Church's Most Vital Need

Text: Acts 4:23-31

Introduction:

Last time, we saw that the Apostle's Peter and John were severely threatened by the Sanhedrin (the religious leaders of Israel), to no longer preach in "the Name of Jesus." And here we have the first major form of opposition that has arisen against the church, since she has begun to prosper at Pentecost. "Look, you want to speak to people...fine. You want to do miracles...fine. Just leave this 'Jesus of Nazareth' out of it." And isn't that what the enemy would love to accomplish, brethren? "Do whatever you want in the name of religion; keep your religion, teach about God...but leave repentance and faith in Jesus, out of it." "Leave the Cornerstone out of the temple, and continue on with your building."

And while the threat of persecution is *presently* minimal in our country, is it not amazing to see how many people despise anything to do with Jesus, unless his Name is blasphemed or taken in vain? Indeed, you can even talk about God, in some general sense, but "Jesus" is just not very tolerable, is He?

Well, the Apostles could do nothing less than testify to all that they have seen and heard, and they made this clearly known to the Sanhedrin. "Look, whether or not it is right in your eyes to listen to God or men, you decide...but we have to continue to testify in this Name. For He is the very foundation of all hope; He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; He is the *only* way to God...Jesus of Nazareth *is* the Gospel!" "Threaten as you will, we will and must continue to preach in the Name of Jesus!"

Needless to say, the disciples left that meeting "in the high court," with a wave of severe threats following them, and they were not too proud to think that they didn't desperately need boldness, and not merely boldness, but Holy Spirit infused boldness, in order to continue on with their mission of building Christ's church. Remember, we said last time that the message of the Gospel retains its power under any and all circumstances. We never, ever have to change or compromise the Gospel message, in order to meet some pending demand, brought about by our culture or circumstances. The weakness that exists then, lies in the vessel or the instrument that God has

ordained to carry the message. The weakness lies in *us!* We need ongoing wisdom, discernment and boldness, as we seek to faithfully proclaim the Gospel message in every context, within which God places us. We desperately need, above all else, the Holy Spirit's direction, guidance and strength, or we will not persevere in our task as individuals, and as a church (as individuals representing the church). We need; the church needs, above all else, the ongoing "filling of the Spirit!" And brethren, this "filling," is not to be equated with regeneration (which never changes), but rather, it has to do with ongoing empowerment, enabling us to do what we just cannot do naturally. The moment our ministry changes hands from God to us, in any sense, is the moment that we work unto a fruitless cause! We need the Spirit, brethren! And the good news is that God is more than willing to freely give His Spirit to all who ask! But, we must ask! We must be a praying people, brethren! And that is what we see exemplified here before us, as we follow the pattern of the early church, in her successful Gospel labors!

Leaving the Sanhedrin and all of their threats, the Apostles report to their brethren, and together, in unity, they lift up their voices to God, seeking a fresh "filling of the Holy Spirit," so that they might continue on with their Gospel labors, with boldness, carrying the unchangeable message of power, in fragile *earthen vessels!*

I. Praying in the Will of God

Brethren, let us examine the prayer "blue print," given to us here, by the early church:

1) [Read verse 24]: Notice, *together*, they begin by acknowledging the reality of God's sovereignty, rooted back in His unique role as the sovereign Creator of all things. And by doing this, they profess God's ability to superintend all matters, concerning the unfolding of history, especially in the face of any and all who would oppose Him. "Lord, we are weak; we are needy; these things are far beyond our control, BUT, You are God! You are the One who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them..."

"This is your creation! You created it out of nothing, and everything that exists, exists by your power, and is maintained by Your power!" This being the work of Your hands, confirms to the utmost degree, that you are yet, sovereign over it all!"

"And so, the opposition that we are facing, and which is far too strong for us, is less than a grain of sand in Your sight. All of the nations, in fact, are nothing before You; they are, as Isaiah stated, but a drop in the bucket, but weightless dust on the scales, compared to Your greatness, Your power and Your majesty! Nothing whatsoever, can thwart your will!"

Now brethren, here is the especially great news, concerning the opening of this prayer. God has not changed, has He? In other Words, the same sovereign God, who ruled then, and who created all things (heaven and the earth and the sea...and all of their contents), is sovereignly ruling today! Our economic bubble, North Korea, Iran, our government, our rights...whatever happens with any and all of these things and all else, is beneath the sovereignty of our God and Creator! And in any setting, whatsoever, we can assume that God is yet able to do all things, and He will most certainly prosper His revealed will in whatever historical context, presently exists. And so, they begin with, "God, you created...and therefore, you are able!"

2) [Read verses 25-28]: Again, we find the people of God, bringing their present context into the sphere of God's revealed will, given in His Word. And in doing so, we find them now proclaiming in their prayer, not only God's ability, but also His willingness to do all that is in accord with His will. Indeed, the nations, the peoples and the kings of the earth have all taken their stand against God...they have collectively gathered together, attempting to thwart the will of God [throughout all of history, for that matter]; opposition not unlike the Apostles were presently facing [and that we face and will face, brethren] have contended with God and His will, ultimately refusing to submit to the authority and reign of His Christ. But God laughs, does He not? And God turns even the very wicked plans of His enemies into means for accomplishing His glorious purposes.

Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate, and the Gentiles [The Romans] and the Israelites all attacked from different angles, with one common mission, "Destroy this Jesus!" They conspired together; they spoke and acted with seemingly great authority and power. They seemed to be in the driver seat, overpowering the Christ, who was silent, who was subjected to their wicked abuse, even unto His own crucifixion and death. And they mocked Him and beat Him and killed Him...and seemed to succeed in thwarting the very will of God, concerning His Anointed. But, in all of this, we are told (in verse 28), that they were merely doing all that God had purposed and determined beforehand, unto the exaltation and glorification of His Anointed. The

ultimate paradox is that, by their unjust crucifying of the Messiah, they were enthroning Him! The enemies of God, with all of their wicked intentions, were used by God, to bring about the eternal salvation of God's elect, through the death of His Son! And this would in turn, lead to His glorious resurrection, whereby He would be given all authority in heaven and on earth, and over all things!

And so, by praying in this way, the disciples of Christ not only acknowledge God's sovereign ability to do all things, but they further evidence that ability by proclaiming God's sovereignty in the unfolding of His will in the ultimate paradox; the death of Christ, being the victory of Christ over death and all of His enemies! And this great victory is what assured the disciples of their present success, in the face of the present threats, which were continuing to come against God and His Anointed, especially as His work relates to the building of Christ's church! God is not only able...but He is willing, because it is His very will to prosper the church, be it through times of peace or times of great persecution. And it is to this end that the disciples now bring forth their plea!

[But notice, how they pray in the will of God here, brethren..."whatever you ask according to His will...we can be certain that we have the things for which we ask!"-- This is the context within which those texts find their application!]

3) [Read verses 29-30]: They bring out their present plea, grounded in the reality of God's sovereignty and His revealed will. Notice, they don't pray for their own safety (in fact, they might expect the opposite), but rather, they pray that God would prosper His will for His Anointed Christ, through them, granting them boldness and the ability to testify in His Name, by every means, within that historical context (as the foundation of the church is being laid).

Brethren, we continue to build that church today (the infrastructure), and that ought to be our greatest concern, within our own historical context. And we can, indeed, pray to the same end, expecting the same results, as God is still unfolding the purposes of His will in Christ, unto the consummation of His glorious Kingdom! We look forward with the same goal in mind, knowing that His work is not yet complete. And more than anything else, we desire to be faithful, to be bold, and to rightly proclaim the glory of our Beloved and Blessed Christ...to all, in our generation!

4) [Read verse 31]: And when they had prayed!...the place shook, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness! God answered!

We desperately need the Holy Spirit's empowering, brethren! We desperately need God to keep us faithful with His truth! We need help, as vessels of clay, called to carry the life changing message of power! We must pray...*together*, in unity! And we can be certain, that God will answer!

[Getting our priorities straight...and an infusion of faith as we are forced to meditate on the Word and will of God, when we pray...because, we forget, don't we. Prayer brings us back to Biblical reality, so that we can be faithful in the context of what our senses see, feel and experience!]

Habakkuk 3:17-19

AMEN!!!