

## We Need Boldness

- Acts 4:23-31
- As you remember if you were here last week, persecution has broken out in the brand new church. It doesn't take long for Satan to mount a counter-offensive, and it started with the Sanhedrin commanding Peter and John not to speak any longer and to any one in THAT name. What name? One of the key verses in the book of Acts and perhaps in the NT is Acts 4:12, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." What is paramount? Salvation. And what is paramount is also exclusive: in Jesus only. No other name. And what is paramount and exclusive is also universal: no other name under heaven. So the Sanhedrin counter that absolute truth with their own absolute lie or absolute threat: You will not speak or teach to anyone in THAT name. Paramount: speaking, communicating. Exclusive: in THAT name. Universal: with ANY one! Saints, we can be sure that any time anyone commands anybody NOT to speak in the name of Jesus, there is another spirit at work there. It is spiritual warfare. Not just political correctness or multi-faith pluralism. So today we examine how the first church dealt with that spiritual opposition that was represented by the threats of the establishment. May God help us to follow our forebears of faith down this same path. Let's look at The Report, then The Prayer, and finally, The Answer. And oh, what an answer it was!
- **The Report**
- First, it is interesting that Peter and John went straight back to "their friends," which presumably was part of the church. I don't think this was limited to the apostles, but would have included a larger subset of the 10,000 member church. Maybe the original 120. Think of it as their home group. We don't know how many people they reported to. But they went back and told their friends in the faith all that the Sanhedrin had said to them. I love the humility of Peter and John. These two men were apostles. They had been with Jesus. Peter had just told a lame beggar to be healed and the man had gotten up and walked for the first time in his 40+ years on the earth. But when Peter and John faced trouble, the first thing they did was go to the church. Not before they went to God in prayer but so that they could **all** go to God in prayer. Together. They needed the help of the body of Christ. So do you. So do I. I had the privilege several weeks ago to interview a good friend of mine about his job as the Executive Director of the Frederick Rescue Mission in Frederick, Maryland. He told me about the work that they do there and the men they help move from addiction and homelessness to freedom from addiction, and to a relationship with Jesus Christ and with a local church. Arnold said, "The mission works to see eight changes in the men who live there: 1- Be passionate for Jesus. 2- Be victorious over addiction. 3- Be connected to a local church. 4- Have a mentor or accountability partner. 5- Be reconciled to his family as much as possible. 6- Have a GED or appropriate level of education. 7- Have a financially sustaining job. 8- Have a safe and suitable place to live." It occurs to me that we at Antioch desire to see those same eight changes in every one of our men. And women. But look at that list and see how many of those are relational. A relationship with Jesus is most important. A relationship with the church. A relationship with someone who will help you be accountable. A relationship with your family.
- Peter and John went straight from trouble to the church. Not to complain or to stir up dissension against those who had troubled them. But to ask for prayer. Peter was a man's man if there ever was one. And John was one of the two "sons of thunder." No sissies here. Strong men. It is the strongest man who knows his help is in the Lord, and in His brothers and sisters in the Lord, not in his own strength.
- **The Prayer**
- We have seen the boldness of the apostles in witness. Now we see their boldness in prayer. Notice that in the first five verses of this prayer, the church reminds God of who He is. Not

because God needed them to remind Him of who He is. But because WE need to pray that way. WE need to be reminded every time we pray WHO God is. When Jesus taught us to pray, "Hallowed be Thy name," He was instructing us to fill our mind with thoughts of how great and how good God is! It's like the guys at Graham Cinema, that before the movie starts, they focus the lens. That's what this type of prayer does. It focuses the lens so that we can see more clearly whom we are talking to. Look at the three ways they talked about God right to His face. 1- Sovereign Lord of Creation. (vs.24b) You made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them. By implication, you made the chief priests and the elders and the rulers and every one of the Sanhedrin just like you made us. Lord, they are threatening us like they think THEY made us! But we submit to a higher authority, the Highest. 2- Lord of Revelation. vs. 25) You said through David a thousand years ago that the nations would rage against Your Son. And how did God respond when He saw the nations raging and the peoples plotting and the kings scheming? He laughed! You want to make God laugh? Tell the church to stop speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus Christ. But God's laughter quickly turns: "Then He will speak to them in His wrath and terrify them in His fury." (Psalm 2:5). 3- Lord of History. (vs. 27) You gathered Herod and Pontius Pilate and the Gentiles and the people of Israel to carry out what You had predestined! They could do nothing more. They could do nothing less. We can have absolutely the same confidence today, that those who utter threats and carry them out against the church can do nothing more and nothing less than what God has decreed. He is sovereign over all or He is not sovereign AT all! (verse 28) John Stott writes, "This was the early church's understanding of God, the God of creation, revelation and history, whose characteristic actions are summarized by the three verbs, 'You made,' 'You spoke,' and 'You decided.'"

- When the church had hallowed God's name, then they turned to three requests.
- First, they asked the Lord to look upon the threats of those who opposed Him. Verse 29, "Look upon their threats." It's good for us to see that the first thing they asked for had nothing to do with their lives, their families, their reputation. Even though they knew all of those were at risk. Elisabeth Elliot wrote about this in her book, *The Savage, My Kinsman*, acknowledging that when she took her little daughter Valerie and moved into the Auca village to live with the people who had killed her husband, there was every possibility she and Valerie might die. And that it was even likely that they would be killed. "Psychologists tell us to 'do the thing we fear.' Good advice, probably, for conquering the smaller fears. It would hardly apply to the great fear, the fear of death. There is only one answer for this—to know Him who holds the keys of death and is Himself the Lord of life." So, the Sanhedrin have threatened Peter and John. Remember, this same Sanhedrin condemned Jesus to death. And they will do the same with James, the brother of John. When Peter and John were threatened, it was not an empty threat. If I knew that to continue preaching the Gospel would mean that one of my family or all of my family might be taken to prison or even put to death, what would I do? Or if I knew that if I continued preaching I would be arrested and never get to see my wife and children and grandchildren again, what would I do? I know what I would be tempted to do! To stop preaching. Was Peter tempted that way? Or John? Maybe, but their prayer is not about their own desires or fears. It is centered in the glory of Christ.
- Second, they asked for boldness.
- It reminds me of the times we have heard brothers and sisters who are part of the persecuted church all over the world say, "Don't pray that the persecution would stop. Pray for us to endure it. Pray for boldness. Pray for souls to be saved. Pray for the church to prosper and grow." The disciples prayed for boldness so they could continue to speak God's word. Most of the church needs to pray that God would grant boldness to BEGIN to speak God's Word with boldness.

- Third, they asked for God to continue to stretch out His hand to heal and that signs and wonders might be done through Jesus' name. In other words, God continue to confirm the Word we are preaching with signs and wonders. Amen!
- **The Answer** (vs. 31)
- I love this verse. Always have. And sometimes over the years, at various times, I have whispered that prayer to God in a prayer meeting or during a service. "God, would you shake this place with Your presence and would you fill us with Your Spirit?" But notice, that is NOT what the disciples were praying for! They weren't asking for a sign from heaven. They were asking for boldness to speak about Jesus. God loved that prayer and answered it in a way that very much parallels that He did at Pentecost. 1- There was an initial sign from God at both. Pentecost: a mighty rushing wind. Here: the whole place was shaken 2- They were filled with the Holy Spirit. Same words in Acts 2:4 and 4:31, "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit." It IS a repeatable event. It must be. We need it. 3- There was a manifestation of the Spirit's power. Pentecost: spoke with other tongues. Here: spoke the Word of God with boldness.
- Let me ask you this? Do we need an outpouring of the Holy Spirit? Yes! No matter what we think about Antioch, whether you think this is a good church or a bad church or a mediocre church, we need the power of the Holy Spirit. We need it because the world is hardened and the culture we live in is corrupt. But we also need it because we are so earthbound, so entertainment-saturated, so much in love with our comfort and our security. We need an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- Leadership Frederick: At the end of the 9 month course there is a retreat. The retreat concludes with about 30 + people individually sharing his or her answer to two questions: 1) What is the most important thing in your life? 2) What do you plan to be doing in 5 years? I was last ( or near the very end). With that many people I was shocked no one mentioned his or her faith - faith of any sort. When it came my turn, I said: You asked the question so you are going to get my answer - Jesus Christ, He is the most important thing in my life. Over 30 years ago I ran into a telephone pole at 110 miles per hour and I am still here to tell about it. He died on the cross for me and rose from the dead. I have life now and for eternity. As far as 5 years from now, I don't have a clue except I am going to be following Him; I will let His lead determine my future.