

How to Pray When We are Threatened- Acts 4:23-32
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

Its an honest question. What would be the first thing you would do if you were arrested for sharing Jesus, threatened and warned not to do it again, and then let go with the realization that if you got caught again the outcome might be dangerous? Maybe our first response would be to file a petition with the Supreme Court declaring that our freedom of religion had been violated. Or maybe I just get out of town, away from the threat. Another possibility would be to organize a demonstration in front of city hall. This is the situation Peter and John find themselves in. They proclaimed Jesus in the Temple after healing the lame man, and as a result more people believed in Jesus. Yet, they got arrested and were quickly taken before the Sanhedrin and the family of Chief Priests. This is basically the Supreme Court and ruling family among the Jews. Peter and John are commanded to stop preaching and healing in Jesus' name. This threat is legitimate. We must not forget that this is the exact group of people who a few months earlier ordered the murder of Jesus, so offing these two guys would not be difficult. Yet, there was that pesky problem of the man who had to be carried in that morning, as he had been for 40 years, now jumping, dancing, and praising God in the Temple. Still, to continue preaching could have dire consequences.

So what do they do? They immediately find the church to pray. I have to be honest with you, this is probably my favorite prayer in all of Scripture. Its not just that they prayed in this moment, but what they prayed that deeply challenges me. Maybe our first response would be to pray, but more than likely the prayer would go like this. "Lord, keep us safe. Don't let anything evil happen to me. Provide a hedge or protection around us." Now, nothing necessarily wrong with praying for protection, and nothing wrong with pursuing religious liberty in the public square. Yet, this prayer is vastly different, as is the response by the Holy Spirit. But to get to this prayer we have to go back a few chapters to Acts 2:42.

In that text we were told that the early church in Jerusalem was devoted to the Apostle's teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. Do you see that, they were devoted to prayer. This church had a passionate and consistent prayer life. This means they were devoted to personal prayer, as disciples voiced their worship to God and brought their requests to Him. But they also had a vital and devoted corporate prayer life. I believe there is a clear connection in Luke's writing from this phrase to our current text. In other words, Luke 2:42-47 is a quick snapshot of the activity of the early church, the "what" to their activity. But the following chapters show us the how and the why to these activities. And here is the clear connection I would like us to make. We don't get the powerful prayer of Acts 4 without the devotion to prayer in Acts 2.

So often the crisis drives us to prayer. Before life unleashes hardship, persecution, suffering, and moments for doubt our prayers are often shallow, me-centered, and infrequent. But when the crisis comes we get to praying. Yet, those prayers are often me-centered again, just louder and more frequent. Now, God loves us, and He does answer those prayers. Yet a church devoted to prayer puts themselves in the position of seeing the power of God shape their lives deeply and show up in power as they seek to honor Him. This prayer, which is anything but self-centered flows from the reality that the Jerusalem church was already a praying, dependant church, devoted to lifting their voices to God. So it was natural for this prayer to be the first response to these threats.

So, lets look at the prayer. A few quick things. First, recognize how this prayer begins with praise and worship, acknowledging the sovereignty of God. This first step is so important. When crisis arrives we so often see our problems as massive and God as very small. The first several verses aligns their perspective with what is reality, yet an unseen reality. God made heaven and earth, and has already revealed in Scripture His rule of the

nations and their leaders. In fact, when the plot against His people, and ultimately His Son, God laughs at their self-importance. Their praise lifted their souls and put them in a place of remembering their place in God's purpose and plan. Second, they prayed a Psalm, using Scripture as the foundation of prayer. Praying Scripture, and specifically the Psalms is the great path in prayer to lift our prayer toward being God-centered. Then they pray with their neighbors and the nations in view. Notice they don't pray for safety, they pray for boldness to continue proclaiming Jesus, witnessing of Him. Why would they do this? Because they know that the people in their city are lost and without Christ and if they go silent these people will have no hope. Their role in the great narrative of God is to be a witness. So they pray for boldness to keep speaking regardless of the threat. Finally, they pray for power, for healing, signs, and wonders. They ask God to do things in their midst that can only be explained by His work and glory. What a prayer, we should gather regularly and pray it!

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
2 Samuel 20	2 Samuel 21	2 Samuel 22	2 Samuel 23	2 Samuel 24	2 Samuel 25	2 Samuel 26

Reading from this past week: Acts 4:23-32

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Acts 4:32-5:16

Family Worship

Song - *His Mercy is More*

<https://youtu.be/l1GiZL60c80>

Gospel Project

Unit: A Pattern of Disobedience

Story: God used Samson

Big Picture Question: What is the fair payment for sin?

Answer: The fair payment for sin is death.

Scripture: Judges 13-16

New City Catechism

Question #18: Will God allow our disobedience and idolatry to go unpunished?

Answer: No, God is righteously angry with our sins and will punish them both in this life, and in the life to come.

Verse: Ephesians 5:5-6

Scripture

Acts 4:23-32

- If you had been threatened like Peter and John, what do you believe would be your first response?
- How can acknowledge God's sovereignty and the praise of His glory and faithfulness help us gain perspective when life is overwhelming and hard?
- Why would they pray for boldness instead of safety? What does this teach us about our prayers?
- Have you ever asked God to send signs and wonders through His church? Why or why not?

Prayer

*Spend time using the prayer in Acts 4 as a model prayer for you and your family.

*Pray for our ladies event this weekend.