

Prayer 911
The Early Church Responds to Crisis
The Empowered Church Series – Part 7

Acts 4:23-31
Feb 18-19, 2023

Introduction

- **Crisis is Inevitable – but whether it builds us up or tears us down is our decision.** We get to decide if we keep our eyes on Jesus or not. Jesus rebuked the disciples during the storm on the Sea of Galilee because they had Jesus RIGHT THERE in the boat with them. They were reacting off circumstances instead of the reality of God in their midst. I'm not always great in crisis, I'll be honest. So, I'm not lifting myself up as the holier than thou, or role model on this one. I'm a work in progress. One of my greatest embarrassments happened in a crisis (Cornerstone Conference 1992)
 - **The Shape of Water**
 - **Battle Ships** – my story of kayaking the San Juan Islands. Turning into the wave. **Boats are made to weather storms, but you have to keep them oriented properly. The same is true of humans navigating the storms of life.**
 - **Water Legs & Snow Shoes** – skiing & snowboarding or Avalanche? – what can be fun (snowboarding and skiing) can also be dangerous and devastating. It can turn in a moment. **The key is whether you are on top of it or it's on top of you.**
 - **The Rides of Our Lives: Chasing Mavericks** – surfing is all about finding the big waves and riding them. There are some in this world who go after scary big waves, the very same waves that would destroy things. They seek what others avoid. Do you remember the 2012 Gerard Butler movie, Chasing Mavericks? Ya, it's those guys. What's fascinating about that is the risk that it may not turn out well for the rider. There are some storms and waves of our lives that mark the end and our transition to glory. But even then we never fully know until the end. The goal would be to ride it as if we will come out the other side but do what we can to enjoy the ride along the way. Some of the ride is simply freaking out and hanging on, but then again there can be extraordinary times of God's power. Many stories of martyrdom have involved miraculous events.

The Right Response to Crisis is to GATHER and PRAY

- **Recap & Context** – if you are just joining us, here's where we are at in the story.
 - **Peter and John heal a paralyzed guy** - Two of Jesus' leaders that He handed off the ministry to, who were leading the fledgling Christian Church, Peter & John, went to temple one day and God led them to heal a paralyzed man who was begging at one of the gates. When he was healed he was jumping all over the place in the Temple and it caused a HUGE crowd of thousands to gather.
 - **Peter preaches to thousands** - Peter preached to them a powerful message.
 - **They are arrested & questioned** - While they were preaching, the Jewish authorities and temple guard showed up and arrested them. The next morning they were brought before the Jewish Supreme Court who questioned them. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, explodes with an amazing response that was clearly above his paygrade.

- **Threatened and set free** - The leaders couldn't do anything serious about it because everyone had seen the miracle and no one could deny it, so they warned them not to talk about Jesus any more or there would be serious consequences. And they meant it. They were the group that had Jesus Crucified not that long ago. They could beat you, imprison you, kill you, kick you out of society or just make your life miserable.
- **We pick the story up there...**

Lesson

- **When Community Matters the Most**
 - **Peter & John Return to Church to Process the Threats**
 - **Acts 4:23-24a** – *“When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God...”*
 - **They were released** – this time God let them be released. This was not the case for John the Baptist, not the case for Jesus and soon will not be the case for James, John's brother. It doesn't always work out that way. But this time it did.
 - **They went to their friends** – I LOVE this description of the early Church...friends. In Introducing Bridgeway (our meet and greet with new folks), we always say, 'church is more fun with friends.' Truly a healthy Church is filled with Christian friends doing stuff together for the Lord. It was not an academic institution. It was not a, 'oh I have to go' situation. It was a gathering of people whom they loved and who loved them. That's the church I want to go to. That doesn't just happen, there's a way for that to be developed.
 - **Reported the Bad News** – Remember, we already heard the bad news, but the Church hadn't heard the story yet. They only know that yesterday Peter and John were arrested. They don't know if they are alive or dead and they certainly don't know any details. So Peter and John catch them back up and explain how it ended with serious and vicious threats that in the moment they may have been okay with, but after the adrenaline and Holy Spirit boldness wore off, really concerned them.
 - **When Community Matters the Most** – **We do not realize the power of a support system until crisis.** We don't realize the power of a small group until they are surrounding us in our greatest point of need. I am not saying that we ONLY pour ourselves into a small group for insurance. I'm saying that while we pour into a small group of trusted friends, we get a lot of benefits and one of them is that they are there when the proverbial poop hits the fan. I've heard countless stories about groups rallying around one another through cancer, through loss, through house fires, etc. When things are going well for us or we have the money to solve our problems, we forget the importance of community.
 - **Sometimes it's Natural and Sometimes it's Intentional** – Too often we don't see the need for a support community until it's too late. Sometimes we just kind of fall into a group of friends and they are there in the critical moments. But sometimes we need to have some foresight and pour into others so that when the time comes we are not alone. It's my goal to always pour into the people around me a ton so that when I go through tough times they not only have grace and prayers for me, but they are willing to rally around me knowing that I've already done the same for them.
 - **They lifted their voices TOGETHER (prayed)** – Why corporate/group prayer is so powerful and why we need to do it more. Personal prayer is vital, but so also is

group prayer. They seem to do two different things. **Private prayer is where intimacy is gained, relationship is deepened, and personal messages are delivered. Group prayer is where things get done, where support occurs, where community bonds are formed.** It's not that God does move those ways in the alternate experiences, it's just that those unique expressions are built specifically for those things. I don't believe that we will have the power and advancement as a church until more of us come together for group prayer.

- **Like Master, Like Servant**

- **Peter & John Pray with the Church About the Bad Guys**

- **Acts 4:24b-28** – “...and said, [quoting Psalm 2]¹ “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,²⁵ 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?²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed”²—²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus³, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place...”
- **What did they say in their prayer?** – I think all of us question whether or not we are doing prayer right. Right? Show of hands. I'm that way. I've prayed my whole life and taught on prayer, but in the back of my mind I'm wondering if the Lord just kind of compensates and sorts the mail for His spiritually special needs boy (me). So, when we get to study the written and recorded prayers of the saints, it's like a treasure trove. How do they do it? What's the content? Is there anything special that we need to know?
- **Sovereign Lord and Creator** – Notice the opening. Wow! It's dialing in on the nature and character and works of God. Why would they start this way? Notice that it's the same way that Jesus Christ taught them to pray (“Our Father, who is in Heaven. Hallowed be your name.”). The point is to lock into the character of God before we start talking because it's the cornerstone of our communication to come. If we get His nature right, then we will speak more accurately about what we need and how to talk to deity. We need to reflect on His great character. We need to reorient ourselves to the One True Master after living in a world of opinions. We need to ground ourselves BEFORE we start talking.
- **Reflecting on What He's Said Prior (why quote Scripture to God?)** – what is the point of quoting Scripture back to God who wrote it in the first place? It's like someone quoting one of my books to me. I know! I wrote it! So, obviously when

¹ “This psalm, with its explicit reference to Yahweh's anointed one (Messiah), had been interpreted of the coming deliverer of David's line at least as early as the middle of the first century B.C.; the words “You are my Son” (Ps. 2:7), addressed to Jesus at his baptism by the heavenly voice, actually hailed him as that Messiah. In conformity with this understanding is the interpretation which the apostles now place on the opening verses of the psalm.” NICNT

² “The “Gentiles” raged against Jesus in the person of the Romans who sentenced him to the cross and carried out the sentence; the “peoples” who plotted against him are (despite the plural) the Jews, or rather their rulers; the “kings” who set themselves in array are represented by Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea, while the “rulers” are represented by Pontius Pilate. The reference to Herod harks back to the account in Luke 23:7–12, where Pilate, learning that Jesus is a Galilaean, performs a diplomatic courtesy by referring him to Herod. Luke is the only one of the four evangelists who gives Herod a role in the passion narrative.” NICNT

³ “The prophetic language of the psalm showed that Pilate, Herod, and the others, in uniting against Jesus, were simply carrying out “God's appointed counsel and foreknowledge” (as it was called in 2:23), “that the Messiah was to suffer” (3:18). In these words of the apostles there is an explicit identification of God's “holy Servant Jesus” with the royal Son of God addressed in Ps. 2:7. Jesus, God's obedient servant, is the one whom God “anointed” or made Messiah—at his baptism.” NICNT

people quote Scripture to God they are not trying to tell Him something He doesn't know or even remind Him of what He said. He knows what He said and doesn't forget. Usually, the reason we use Scripture is to dial ourselves in. We need to remind ourselves what we KNOW is true about God and let that inform how we should communicate with Him now. Also, when we are leading corporate/group prayer, we are getting everyone on the same page. We will quote something that everyone can connect to and get their heads in the game so that we collectively are sharing the same heart and mind in our prayer.

- **God spoke via the Holy Spirit Through King David** – Although I have not done recent study on Psalm 2 and whether it was a Davidic Psalm or not, it doesn't change my point. My point is that God speaks via one of His three persons: Father, Son or Holy Spirit. This time it was via the Holy Spirit but it didn't stop there. Although it was the Holy Spirit's message it came through the lips of the vehicle King David (or whatever Psalmist wrote it or sung it). My point is that God speaks through us His people in the same way. Usually it's going to be the Holy Spirit creating a message for us in our hearts and minds that we speak out with our lips.
- **What passage are they quoting and why?** – Again, Peter is quoting the Old Testament. This time it's specifically Psalm 2. It was a famous Messianic Psalm (prophetic Psalm about the coming Messiah or Anointed One). Their point was that just as the prophecies said, the Messiah was going to have enemies that would threaten and harm Him, but that God Almighty would protect and vindicate Him. In the same way they wanted to be protected as they carried out the ministry of Jesus Christ they had been left.
 - Ps 2:1–12 – “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, ³ “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.” ⁴ He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. ⁵ Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, ⁶ “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” ⁷ I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. ⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.” ¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. ¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. ¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”
- **Jesus dealt with bad guys** – Herod, Pontius Pilate, Romans, Jewish Leaders. Those are the cast of characters that Peter calls out that fashioned the murder of Jesus Christ. Of course there were more involved but those were the instigators and key people/groups. Just like the Psalmist was talking about enemies, so too did Jesus fulfill that prophecy of the Messiah by facing the bad guys.
- **We have bad guys too** – Peter's point was that just as Jesus had bad guys to contend with, so do they (and btw, so do we). All of that was a lead up to Peter asking for protection and help with the current bad guys, not to give God a history lesson.
- **But we know that YOU are in charge** – and this is the reorientation that the Church (and we) needed to have. God's in charge. He always was and always will be. We are not in a random scenario; we are following a script of sorts. Although

the details are still being ironed out, the gist is written in stone. God is going to build His church and it's going to clash with the culture and the enemy. **This means that God knew it was coming, prepared for it, and has a plan RIGHT NOW to deal with it.**

- **So, let's recap what we learned about prayer just now** – 1.) we begin with God's nature and character so that it shapes the rest of what we will say. 2.) We take a moment to remember what He's done prior so that our faith is high for what He can do today. 3.) We honor God in all of our words and don't become grumbling or complaining, although we can share true emotion, fear, and frustration. 4.) It's okay to ask for things because God is the only one who can do anything about some situations and He told us we can approach Him on those things.
- **Phone a Friend**
 - **The Church Prays for Practical and Supernatural Help**
 - **Acts 4:29-30** – *“And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants⁴ to continue to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”*
 - **And Now**, – that's a transition statement. They've been focusing on the bigger picture and they are now shifting to the direct situation in which they are in.
 - **Lord** – Notice, they still use the term Lord, which means master. They realize that they are not demanding anything. They are not forcing anything. They are not manipulating anything. They are not bartering for anything. They are requesting from their master who is still in charge not just of the world and their situation, but of their hearts and the Church. **Our prayers should be littered with the term Lord to keep us on track.**
 - **Take Notice of what the bad guys are doing** – it doesn't mean that God doesn't see it already. He does. It means and now take action on what you have been observing. And that's a lot of the way that we need to read some passages and prayers in the Bible. Over and over, we see someone say, 'God look at what's happening,' as if God was like, 'what's that? Oh my goodness!' That's not true. God is tracking on all of it and the only reason we notice it is because He pointed it out.
 - **What Do They Want?** – we tend to pray with a need waiting in the wings. God knows that and doesn't seem to be offended. Although it's important for us to balance our greediness.
 - **Boldness** – what is this and why do they want it? They know what they have to do, Jesus already told them. They HAVE to be witnesses of the Resurrection of the Messiah. They can either do that terrified or they can do that boldly. They want to do it boldly. Boldness means that you have strength in you not to cave in due to fear. They need that desperately since the threats and attacks are real.
 - **Supernatural Ministry** – They wanted God to continue flowing in the ministry so that they could get done what they needed to get done. Their calling was higher than their natural abilities and they needed God's power to do it.

⁴ “They call themselves God's “slaves” (δοῦλοι), perhaps deliberately using a humbler term than that applied to Jesus as God's servant (παῖς).”
NICNT

- **Healings** – How would this help in this situation? Not only were the apostles carrying on the ministry of Jesus Christ and He healed people, but their love for people demanded that they do something to alleviate their condition when God says it's okay. They needed healings because of the pain they experienced in their people. The same is true of us.
- **Signs and Wonders** – what are these? Signs and wonders are usually classified slightly different than miracles. Miracles mean that God did something supernaturally and out of the norm. that could or could not be a sign. It certainly would be a wonder. Signs and wonders are a way of classifying God doing something supernatural that forces people to recognize that something bigger is happening. The miracles are signs pointing to something greater than themselves. For example, when Jesus healed the mute demon possessed man that no one thought could be freed, He was giving a sign that He was a different leader, the Messiah. When Peter and John healed the paralyzed guy at the temple it was a sign that a new movement was happening and it wasn't based on the power of people, it was a God thing.
 - **Are we content today to do ministry that doesn't require miracles?** I was thinking to myself that **I don't want to do ministry that can be accomplished by the natural abilities of mankind. It's not good enough.** I want to walk actively in a ministry context that **MUST** have God working to succeed. Then I know that I'm not fooling myself and on my own or building my own kingdom. Then I will know that God is among us and leading us.
- **Who's Doing the Miracles?** – YOU stretch out YOUR hand to... - **This is about SOURCE.** It's God.
 - **The MODE: Through the Name of Your Holy Servant Jesus** – **This is the MODE or the CHANNEL through which the power flows.** God can operate through the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit. He does so for various reasons depending on the role needed. In this case it's going to be THROUGH the name of Jesus (the Son).
 - **The Unsaid VEHICLE: US** – **the Vehicle, or the practical boots on the ground Carrier was Christians.** They were the ones laying their hands on, praying, healing, casting demons, in the Name of Jesus. This was assumed. Sometimes God would work around them, but mostly He worked through them. And He works through us today.
- **Whole Lotta Shakin' Going On**
 - **God Shakes the Place and Answers Their Prayers**
 - **Acts 4:31** – *“And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken⁵, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”*
 - **At the end of the prayer** – It's funny because for many of us who have been in church for a long, long time, we are assuming that something will happen DURING the prayer if it's going to happen at all. If we get to the end and nothing is going

⁵ “The place shook as with an earthquake—whether there was an objective shaking or this was the way in which God's presence and power were manifested to their consciousness cannot be said...” NICNT

on, we assume it was a bust (embarrassingly true). But notice that it's at the end of the prayer, after they were done, that God responded.

- **The Place was Shaken** – this would feel like an earthquake I assume. Did it just feel like that or would a citywide Richter scale go off? I don't know. I guess it doesn't matter but I am curious. Did it also serve as a sign to the neighbors that something was happening over there in that Christian room? Sometimes God does things that feel momentous but are only for us and that's okay. It means that God was having personal time with you.
- **They were ALL FILLED AGAIN⁶** – Remember they just got filled at Pentecost, not they are being filled again. Also, Peter was already filled with the Holy Spirit when he spoke that awesome sermon and answered the Sanhedrin. And yet, he's getting filled again. This is a multiple time thing. We always want to pray for a filling if there's something we need to go do for the Lord. It's not a one and done thing.
- **The Result & Evidence: Boldness** – of all the things that they asked for, boldness was the one they mentioned immediately as being evident. Why? Because they were still together and not actively out in ministry where the other evidence would show up. BUT, they did know that they were empowered and excited and emboldened to get out there and try it again.

Conclusion

- **Our Model for Responding to Crisis and to Prepare for Ministry** – Community and prayer can get us through almost anything. We never know what is going to happen in life, and we can't shield ourselves from everything. Instead of spending time on the defense we should spend our time on the offense and build up a praying community around us.
- **Let's pray together** as a group for God's blessing upon Bridgeway and our hearts to align with His.

⁶ "The description here is reminiscent of the description of what happened on the day of Pentecost, both in the external signs of the Spirit's advent and in the prayerful attitude of the disciples at his coming; but while this was a fresh filling of the Spirit, it could not be called a fresh baptism.⁵⁰ If the narrative of 3:1–4:31 is based on a different source from that of 2:1–41, the filling of the Spirit here is not a duplicate of that in 2:4, when for the first time "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit"; in the present narrative Peter has already been "filled with the Holy Spirit" for his effective defense before the court (4:8)." NICNT