

PRAYER FOR BOLDNESS AND POWER

In order to live faithfully and effectively for Christ in today's world we need courage and we need power. In order to be faithful and effective witnesses to the Lord Jesus Christ, we need boldness and we need power. This group of Christians knew this and they sought God for it.

Verse 31 shows us that God answered in a big way.

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.

God gives them courage to speak and live for Christ. We need courage. **Courage** to do what is right at work. To confess your commitment Jesus Christ before that family member who intimidates you. To tell that friend who is lost about Jesus. To not give into peer pressure at school. To hold onto biblical standards in your home when most seem to be going another way.

God gives them spiritual power to be effective. We need power. Power to deliver a gift of healing to someone who is sick and/or dying. Power to share simply and clearly with someone about Jesus. Power to be given a prophetic utterance for someone that fits the occasion just perfectly. Power lead your children to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

We need courage and power. These Christians received these gifts in answer to this prayer. So what do we see about this prayer that receives such an earth-shaking response? My approach is going to be to answer three questions: **How, Who, and Why?**

1) HOW? How did they pray? Together, united.

Look at verse 23,

When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God...

I love this! They are in trouble and what do they do? They go look for their friends. They look for the church. One drum we want to beat over and over again is that this first century church was a church radically together! The image of the "rugged individual" Christian on his own may be American, but it is not New Testament; and it is not Christian. When it says "they lifted their voices together..." I don't know if they actually all said the same thing - like this was a prayer they had learned together. Or perhaps

Regardless of exactly how the chorus of prayers were lifted up, here is what we see: serious unity. In fact, the NASB puts it this way, they lifted their voices to God "**with one accord**" which means with one mind, one heart, one passion, one impulse. They were so in sync together; they were one in "heart and mind". Romans

15:5-6 speaks of a church glorifying the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ “*with one voice*”. Wow, that’s powerful. It was so much more than just all being nice people who generally were easy to get along with. Psalm 133 alludes to something far deeper that God stamps his approval on:

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded his blessing, life forevermore.

Clearly God commanded his blessing with earth-shaking confirmation. So how did they pray? They prayed for courage and power together, with one passion, one heart and mind, one impulse. In complete unity!

2) WHO? To whom are they praying?

Duh, God. Yes, but... It’s remarkable that these believers take five verses to declare to God who he is and only two to ask him what they want from him. And what they declare is that God is not just powerful, but that his power is untamed, un-domesticated, and wild. When I say wild, I don’t mean it is out of his control - I mean it is out of our control. We see these Christians praying to a God who is **sovereign**. I know there are different views on sovereignty and we would all like our view to line up with the view of these Christians. So let’s see how these Christians viewed God as sovereign. It starts with how they address him and then in describing his actions.

First, look at how they address God in verse 24. Their address to God begins with “Sovereign Lord”. The Greek only used 10 times in NT (despotes) - where we get our word for despot. Usually we use the word despot negatively to mean someone who has universal power and use it cruelly and oppressively. When used of God it means Ruler with universal power and ownership.

We see this as we read on when the believers in their prayer describe God’s actions. First in verse 24 it says he the Sovereign Lord, who **made everything**, “*who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them.*” He is the sovereign ruler and owner of all things by virtue of the fact that he made everyone and everything. Perhaps the most radical verse in all the bible - one that is constantly attacked in our secular culture is Genesis 1:1 - “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” It follows then, that he is the sovereign owner of it all. David knew this when he wrote in Psalm 24 - “*The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof; the world and all who dwell therein. For he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.*” Therefore sovereignty means that all things are at his disposal to do as he pleases (Psalm 115:3).

But they declare his sovereignty not only because he made everything, but also because he is active in history to carry out his plan and purposes. Verses 25-26 is a quotation of Psalm 2,

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? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed"

And then it's applied to Jesus and how kings and rulers, Jews and Gentiles were conspiring to bring him down. And yet, these Christians affirm that God was actually using the evil acts of these men to carry out his plan. Look at verses 27-28:

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, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

Wow. This is amazing! These people sinfully gathered together against Jesus - they really did. And yet they did what God's plan had predestined to take place. When people want to know my view of sovereignty, I don't typically go to Job or Joseph, though I certainly could. I go here - the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. At the time and in the place in the bible when it seems like God is most out of control, he is perfectly carrying out his plan.

Now some hear this and ask, "If God is sovereign as you describe it, why would anyone pray; why would I pray?" I get it. Three responses: 1) Well, God commands us to pray and these people did. That is almost good enough for me. 2) I respond, "Why pray if he's not sovereign?" The kinds of things I want to see him do, he could only do if he is sovereign. Do you ever prayed, "Lord, open and change their heart"? Only a sovereign God can do that. 3) God loves to do his work and carry out his purposes through answered prayer. This is one massive theme in the bible - God doing his work through his praying people.

They prayed for courage and power to a God who is sovereign and has limitless power, who is working out his purpose, and loves to do so through answered prayer.

3) WHY? Why did they pray? What was their motivation? Motivated by God's purposes, not their comfort

There is nothing wrong with praying for protection. The Psalms give us many prayers we can claim for ourselves which echo such requests (Psalm 91). But I do find it fascinating and quite convicting that protection was not the priority of these Christians. They were motivated more by the extension of God's Kingdom and purpose, Christ's mission, and the spread of the gospel than for their own comfort. Verses 29-30 says,

And now, Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

So after they come together with one mind, one heart, one impulse - totally unified and approach the Sovereign Lord who has universal power and ownership of all things to do as he pleases, then they make their singular request. Lord give us courage so we don't chicken out and be silenced by their threats. Evidently their biggest concern was that they would be tempted to be fearful and not speak openly and clearly about Jesus anymore.

Has prayer become a means of getting more and more comforts for me or God's glory and God's purposes? John Piper said, "*The number one reason why prayer malfunctions in the hands of believers is that they try to turn a wartime walkie-talkie into a domestic intercom.*" This makes me think we need a more adventurous, missionary, frontline battle mentality. O, how that kind of mindset would change our prayers!

I'm reading The Hobbit to Silas right now. I can relate to Bilbo (explain). When I feel the battle raging, I can think the same thing. And no there is nothing wrong with relaxing with a cup of tea (coffee would be much better) in a comfortable chair next to a fireplace. Early, almost every morning, I sit on a comfortable couch with coffee and read/pray. But I am tempted to think, "All of life should be like this - easy, safe, comfortable." No! Not until the new heavens and new earth. Timothy perhaps thought the same thing. He has a young man apparently given to fear. Paul reminded him,

Fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God has given us a spirit not of fear (timidity) but of power and love and self-control.

These Christians fought fear with prayer for boldness and power. What a prayer - what a challenging prayer. God grant us to speak with all boldness - a cheerful courage, a freedom and unreservedness to speak without ambiguity and obscure language; openly and frankly of Jesus. That's what they perhaps were tempted to shy away from. And we are too. Fetal Heartbeat Bill at the Capitol.

They prayed for courage and power motivated by God's mission and purpose above their safety and comfort.

GOD'S RESPONSE

Well, God loved this prayer. They had learned well from their Master. Verse 31 says, "*When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness...*"

They asked for boldness power and got the Holy Spirit which resulted in boldness and power. Do you see and feel your need for courage to live for Christ in this world? Do you see your need for spiritual power to be effective for his sake? Well seek it today then!