

## 12. The Church Prayed for Boldness to Speak the Word

In our last topic, we saw that Peter and John spoke to the Jewish Sanhedrin and told them that it was right for them to be obedient to God instead of the Jewish religious leaders. We saw that we want to show our physical and spiritual children by example the importance of obeying our leaders unless they tell us to disobey God. Then, obedience to God must be our first priority. Today, we are going to see how God worked after Peter and John reported to the other church leaders what had happened when they spoke to the religious leaders.

We read in Acts 4:23, “And being let go, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.” The Jewish religious leaders were forced to let Peter and John go with nothing more than threats because of their fear of the people. Peter and John then went to tell the rest of the apostles and the other leaders of the church what the chief priests and elders had said to them. This is a common response when people have been threatened. However, we will see that the action of the leaders was much different than often happens when people are threatened.

Before we see that response, we see that Peter and John reported what the high priests had said to them. It is helpful to understand who was included as these high priests. In Acts 4:6, we saw that Annas was the high priest recognized by the Jews. However, Annas had been removed as the high priest by the Roman governor who ruled over Judea. John 18:13 says, “And they led Him away to Annas first, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas who was high priest that year.” Here, we see that the Romans recognized Caiaphas as the high priest. Caiaphas was the son-in-law of Annas. In addition, five of the sons of Annas later served as high priest. As a result, these seven men were all considered high priests and so were included with the elders as a part of the Sanhedrin.

In response to the threats of the Sanhedrin, Acts 4:24-26 says, “So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: ‘Lord, You *are* God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: “Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ.”’” Here, we see that the response of the leaders of the church to the threats of the Sanhedrin was to pray to God.

We also see that they were all in one accord as they prayed. The word translated “one accord” is used eleven times in the book of Acts and once in Romans. The word is actually a combination of two words “to rush along” and in “unison”. It is like many different musical notes being played but they are all in harmony with one another. In eight different places in Acts, the word is used to show the unity of the early church. In Acts 2:46-47, we read, “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” In our verse in Acts 4, we see that the early church leaders were all in harmony as they prayed together.

The prayer begins by recognizing that God is the One who has all authority. The word translated

“Lord” is not the normal word for Lord. Instead, it is usually translated “master” and means *one with absolute authority*. In 2 Timothy 2:21, we read, “Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.” In this verse, we see that we are useful to the Master when we have cleansed our lives from sin. In fact, our lives are then also prepared for every good work that our Master has for us. The leaders mentioned the fact that the Lord has authority over all creation because He is the Creator. In its use here in Acts, the early church leaders recognized that God had all authority and that in their threats the Jewish religious leaders were just giving a fulfillment of what God had said in the Old Testament would happen in response to Christ.

Then, in their prayer, they quoted Psalm 2:1 which says, “Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing?” Without realizing it, the Jewish religious leaders had done exactly what David had predicted would happen in response to Christ. By quoting this verse in their prayer, the early church leaders actually pointed to the way that God would respond to the threats of the Jewish religious leaders because Psalm 2:2-4 goes on to say, “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, *saying*, ‘Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.’ He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision.” Here, we see that David predicted that the Lord would just laugh at those who thought that they could stop the spread of the message about Christ.

Their prayer went on to say in Acts 4:27-28, “For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.” This prayer shows that the believers recognized that God was in complete control. In fact, God allowed the rebellion of Herod, Pilate, as well as both the Gentiles and the people of Israel to carry out the plan of God.

The Father and Christ had determined before the world was even created that Christ would pay the penalty for sin so that forgiveness could be offered to all people. Ephesians 1:4 says, “Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” This verse points out the fact that it was before the world was ever created that the Father had determined to make us holy and without blame through the death and resurrection of Christ. Ephesians 1:7 says, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” Christ was in agreement that He would shed His blood to buy us back from the penalty of sin and provide forgiveness to us. Here, we see that the early church realized that God was carrying out His plan even though they had been threatened by the Jewish religious leaders.

Acts 4:29-31 says, “‘Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.’ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” The followers of Christ asked the Lord to look carefully at the threats of the Jewish religious leaders and then give His servants boldness to

speak the Word of God. Here, we see that the early church shows us clearly how to handle opposition to the message of the death and resurrection of Christ.

Instead of becoming fearful, we see by the example of the early church that the thing for us to do when we face opposition to the Gospel is to pray and ask Christ to give us His strength to speak the Word of God with boldness. Paul later gave the same encouragement to the church at Ephesus. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians about prayer, he asked them to also pray for him. In Ephesians 6:19, he gave a prayer request for himself, “And for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.” In the same way, we want to help our children learn to respond to opposition to the Gospel by praying and asking the Lord to give them boldness to speak the Word of God.

The early church made a second request in addition to the request for boldness to speak the Word of God. They asked the Lord to stretch out His hand to heal. Here, we are reminded that the Lord is the One who heals. In order to make sure that all glory goes to Christ, James 5:14-15 says, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” If a group of leaders is praying and the Lord chooses to heal, no one person can claim the credit for the healing. Instead, all glory will go to the Lord.

Since the thing that had caused Peter and John to be arrested and brought before the Jewish religious leaders was the healing of the crippled man, the apostles prayed and asked the Lord to respond to the unbelief of the Jewish religious leaders by performing more signs and wonders that would be done through the name of God’s holy Servant Jesus. Hebrews 2:4 says, “God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?” We also see how the Lord answered the prayer of the apostles that day.

The Lord answered their prayer that day by shaking the place where they were praying. Then the apostles and other church leaders who were gathered together with them were all filled with the Holy Spirit. The evidence that they were filled with the Holy Spirit was the fact that they spoke the Word of God with boldness. Here, we see that we do not need to react to the threats of people with fear. Instead, we can respond to such threats by asking the Lord to give us boldness to speak His Word. Hebrews 4:12a tells us “For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword...” We want to show our children by our example the importance of responding to any threats by asking the Lord to give us His boldness to speak the Word of God. May the Lord richly bless you as you help you children learn to pray for boldness to speak the Word of God.