

Sovereign Lord

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everyone. So, scripture readings from Acts 4, 23 to 31.

They'll be on the screen, and if you're using the Pew Bibles, I think it's page 1096. So, let's hear God's word. The believers pray for boldness.

When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, Why did the Gentiles rage and the people's plot in vain?

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed. For truly in this city, they were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

[1 : 2 6] 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.

And when they 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.

Amen. Well, good morning.

It's always good to be over at Bellsill, and good as well to hear some of the different things that God is doing in your midst as He continues just to encourage His church and to grow His church in this community.

Just again, the greetings of Calderwood Baptist Church over in East Co-Bride. We continue to pray for you regularly. Enjoy the fellowship that we have together in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 4 7] And again, just a reminder that if you're sitting there of a beautiful summer's evening thinking, I'd like to go and worship, then you're always welcome at our evening service.

And Stan Adams is up from London. Stan, of course, has preached. Many of you enjoyed Stan during lockdown when we were sharing our worship services together.

And Stan will be preaching this evening at 7. And one other little encouragement for you. Some of you will know the ministry of Charles Price from the Toronto Church in Canada.

And Charles is going to be in Scotland for a little while. And he's going to be at Dowenvale Free Church, Partick in Glasgow.

You can't beat Partick in Glasgow. That's where I started my apprenticeship way back in the day. But I'm preaching in Dowenvale next week. And Charles is going to be there on the Thursday, 29th, Friday, the 30th of June in the evening.

[3 : 54] If you've gone to their website, you can get yourself a ticket for that and go along and enjoy Charles Price's ministry. He's going to be preaching through at the Faith Mission Convention this year.

And Kenny, who's the minister at Downvale, a friend of mine, has managed to get him there for a couple of nights. So if you want to go and hear Charles, you can do that as well. This morning, you've just got to suffer me.

And we're in God's Word. My thanks to Ruth for reading God's Word there in Acts chapter 4. I'm going to encourage you, if you have your Bible or your phone or whatever device you read God's Word on these days, to turn to Acts chapter 4, verse 23.

We're continuing a little series on Word-based evangelism, where we're growing in confidence in the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ, where we're growing in confidence in the power of the Word of God, to bring about transformation in the hearts and lives of those who encounter Christ as we meet Him in the living Word of God.

And we're also going to think a little bit this morning. All throughout Scripture, you find prayer and the Word of God come together. And prayer and the Word are always married to one another, in terms of the power that God releases into our world.

[5 : 25] And so this morning, we're going to think a little bit about those things. But let's pick up the text in Acts chapter 4, verse 23. And the opening little phrase is a fascinating little phrase.

It says, when they were released. It's an incredible little phrase. Because whenever we read, when they were released, immediately our minds start to think about those who've been in prison, or those who've been in bondage, or those who've been captive in some way.

We start to think in those ways. And the truth is that Peter and John, in actual fact, that's exactly what had happened to them.

They had been in prison, and they'd been released by the authorities. And it's quite remarkable when you start to think about, you know, followers of Christ, and here they are in prison.

And why are they in prison? Well, when you look back in the Acts of the Apostles, you discover that on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit of God, that ruach of God, that breath of God, that life and power and movement that God breathes into His people, when the Spirit of God descended into the hearts and lives, and they filled the people of God with power, Peter had proclaimed with great boldness, with great confidence, the good news that salvation is available only in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[6 : 59] And then they continued in that vein, and they went up at the beginning of Acts chapter 3 to the temple, and there was a beggar, a lame beggar, silver and gold have I none, but in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.

And it tells us walking and leaping and praising God. They were just so thankful for all that God was doing. And as they saw the power of God and the Word of God and the power of the name of Jesus at work, the people were filled with a boldness, with a courage, with a confidence, and they wanted to make Jesus known.

But of course, that kind of ministry and that kind of confidence and that kind of courage will get you into trouble. Right? And this morning, I'm going to pray that we'd all have the kind of boldness and courage and confidence that will get us into trouble.

Right? And in the West, for all too long, we've never really had to suffer much when we stand up and declare the name of Jesus. But we know what it is throughout the world for many, many people in actual fact when they do stand up and testify to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to end up in real trouble.

A few weeks ago, I was in Poland. I was ministering there to, you know, a variety of different folks. I was amongst 850 people drawn from all over Europe and all over Asia.

[8 : 30] The Church of Jesus Christ absolutely thriving in Asia. Church of Jesus Christ exploding there. Churches, you know, packed to overflowing.

Church of Jesus Christ. Europe, very different story. Europe's hard ground. Europe's difficult ground. People think they've got answers in and of themselves and their answers all fall short.

But the reality is that's the world we live in. That's Europe. But encouraging signs in Europe, France, that for so long has been so dark, is starting to see some incredible moves of God and some incredible conversions to the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the power of the gospel.

And one of the privileges I had was to get to know a brother. I won't actually tell you the country he's in, simply, you know, for himself, but the reality is I got to know this dear brother.

And this was his testimony. He said, before I became a Christian, he's in one of the former Soviet bloc countries, and he says, before I became a Christian, I was a very quiet, law-abiding citizen, never in any bother whatsoever.

[9 : 47] And then I met Jesus. And because I met Jesus, and I realized the forgiveness there is in Jesus' name, and because I met Jesus and realized the transforming power of the gospel, and because I met Jesus and understood that without Christ, we have a lost eternity, separated from God in hell, I could not keep quiet about Jesus.

He said, and now I'm a Christian. He said, I've been in prison three times. This is strange for us, isn't it? That to profess faith in Jesus Christ could end up with you in prison for what you believe.

But he'd been in prison three times. He says, and even as I am here, he says, three of the members of my church— this is not the ministers— three of the members of my church are in prison right now, and they've been imprisoned allegedly because they are political prisoners.

They are anti-government. They are not anti-government, because God is the designer of government. They are pro-Jesus. That's what they are.

They are pro-Jesus. And they proclaim the good news of the gospel. And many people don't get it. And many people get violent against those who proclaim Jesus.

[11 : 20] And many people imprison them. And it's a biblical expectation. And that's why Peter and John, it seems remarkable, doesn't it?

In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk. And the lame man is walking and leaping and praising God, and they're preaching that God is for us, not against us.

That in the name of Jesus Christ, there is forgiveness of sins. That in the name of Jesus Christ, there is life eternal for all who will put their trust in Him. And that kind of preaching, and that kind of power, and that kind of life and movement got a lot of people into a lot of bother.

And so they found themselves in prison. And one of the beautiful things we were able to do for that dear brother was to have him kneel in our midst and to place our hands upon him.

Not to pray that God would keep him safe. That's not what he wants. But that God would make him bold. That God would give him courage.

[12 : 21] That God would enable him to keep proclaiming the life-saving, the life-giving, the life-changing message of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You know, it's incredible, because when you read on and you read some of the things that had happened, you know, out the back of that man leaping and praising God, Peter started to preach in Solomon's portico.

And as he was there in Solomon's portico, he preached clearly, he preached boldly. Verse 17 of chapter 3, And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers.

But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent, therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Peter preached with boldness. Peter preached with courage. You know, sometimes we look, and we're so hesitant, we're so reluctant at times to just speak the good news of God's love into somebody's heart, into somebody's life.

[13 : 47] But there they were, there they were proclaiming in the public places, calling people to repentance, calling people to faith. And of course, what happens is they get arrested, start of chapter 4, and as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed, because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

Greatly annoyed. And that's what's happening around the world today. Governments are greatly annoyed that there are those who will proclaim that there is only one king. He is king of kings, as we've sung this morning, and lord of lords, and he has conquered life and death and hell itself.

And the reality is the only hope of the world is in Jesus Christ, our Lord. And look what it says in 3 and 4. And don't you love this? The power of man contrasted by the power of God.

So along come these chief priests and leaders and various other things who are going to imprison Peter and John. And it says, verse 3, And they arrested them, and they put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.

That's the action of man. Well, we've silenced them, haven't we? Look what it says in verse 4. But many of those who had heard the word believed. And the number of men came to about 5,000.

[15 : 23] Oh yeah, that's really kept them quiet. 5,000 men have discovered, we don't know how many women and children were there, 5,000 men have found life in Jesus Christ where they kind of lock up, you know, Peter and John and think, that'll sort things out.

You know, they've locked up too and they've just released 5,000. 5,000 transformed by the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is on the move.

God is still on the move. We've got a sovereign Lord. That's what we're going to think about this morning. Sovereign Lord. What does that mean? Sovereign. There is only one king.

It is his kingdom. It is his reign. It is his rule. God is working out his eternal plan, his eternal purpose. The eternal counsel of God is unchanged and unstoppable.

God's working out his plan. That's why when I'm in Poland and I'm hearing, you know, a little bishop in one of the Asian countries and he just says, we don't know what to do.

[16 : 30] You know, too many people are becoming believers. He didn't mean too many in the sense that he wanted less. He just meant, we don't know what to do. You know, God is on the move. There's that kind of day.

Picture that in Bells Hill. You know, we lock up Cal. Some of us, I think, it's a good idea, right? We lock up Cal and 5,000 people, you know, come into the church. You know, so he's in prison.

Sorry, Jim. He's in prison, right? But 5,000 people come in at the church that day. God is on the move. We have a sovereign Lord. Nothing can stand against him.

Nothing can stand against him. And so, they lock them up. And it says, the next day, the rulers and the elders and the scribes gather together. Don't lose sight of that.

Who were those rulers? Who were these elders? Who were these scribes? The very same men who a few weeks earlier had put Jesus Christ on the cross. You know, Peter and John, at a human level, had a right to be afraid.

[17 : 33] At a human level, they had a right to be afraid. You know, Jesus, their Lord, had been in Calvary's cross. Of course, Jesus, their Lord, was now the resurrected Christ. So, they're not afraid of, you know, what death might bring.

You know, I was with a person last night, and they were just saying, do you know what I think? Some of our prayer meetings, we spent half our life praying people out of heaven, you know, rather than just letting them go. And there's truth in that, isn't there?

But the interesting thing is, he was, you know, as they're arrested and God is moving in power, some incredible things happen.

And the chief priests, they get them together and they interrogate them and they investigate them and they tell them that they've, you know, they're not to speak any more about Jesus, that they speak no more in the name of Jesus.

And look what Peter and John say in verse 19, but Peter and John answered them, whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge.

[18 : 43] That's kind of one of those questions that, you know, you kind of, you know the answer, don't you? Whether it's right to listen to you rather than God, you must decide. You know, if I'm a religious leader hearing that, I'm kind of, I know I'm into a hiding to nothing, right?

But at the end of the day, you know, these guys are serious as a heartbeat about, you know, what they're going to do to Peter and John. But look what Peter and John say, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

You know, my friends, there's a word in there for us. Do we want to get confident about making Jesus known? We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

We cannot but speak of what we know of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the leaders threaten them further and, you know, warn that they're going to punish them.

But they're afraid because the people are praising God. Why are the people praising God? Because lame men are leaping and walking and 5,000 men are finding out the true meaning of life.

[19 : 56] God is on the move. And that's why my dear brother is unafraid to go back to his homeland and to make known the good news of Jesus Christ.

When they were released, they went to their friends and they reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. They've told us to shut up.

They've threatened us. They're going to come down heavy upon us. And you know, I love the gather amongst the company of believers. And when the believers heard it, here's what they did.

They lifted their voices together to God. You know, as the people of God, we sometimes try to get too clever, don't we?

Sometimes as the people of God, we start planning, we start scheming, we start thinking about what we might do to sort out this situation, we start thinking about some of the letters we could write and some of the things we could do in our own strength, in our own power, by our own plan, in order to change things.

[21 : 02] But you know what they do? They get together and they call out, Sovereign Lord. They lifted up their voice in praise together.

Sovereign Lord. There's a great way to pray. You know, your brother Robert was right to say, we thank you, we can call you Heavenly Father. But there's a great way to pray. Sovereign Lord.

And here's a beautiful thing, my friends, and this is our God. Let's never lose sight of it. Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them.

that's who we're talking to in prayer, right? Little despot rulers who think they've got some power, who think they've got some prestige, bow before the one who makes heaven and earth and the sea and everything in them.

Now, I'm not going to try to give you a picture of the galaxies. The psalmist does that really well. Karl Morrison is consumed by it. If you want to know about, you know, the universe and the galaxies and the stars and the mathematical scale of it, have a word with your pastor.

[22 : 34] He's obsessed with it. And you know what really upsets him? He's obsessed with what he can be obsessed with and he's obsessed with what he's got. No idea is beyond what he actually knows.

It's that big. And God is bigger. God is bigger. He's the Lord of heaven and earth and the seas and everything.

And I sometimes sit with my grandchildren and watching, you know, the kind of under the sea type, you know, documentaries and you get these weird looking fish that, you know, you've got to go down so deep to see and they kind of pop out from under rock.

He's Lord of all. Everything. That's our sovereign Lord. So, when our backs are to the wall, it's like, sovereign Lord, you made the heaven, the earth, the seas, everything in them.

Who are these guys? to stand against you. That's how we pray. That's what a prayer meeting should look like.

[23 : 42] Sovereign Lord. That's what they do. They cry out. Here's the great thing. They understand that he's sovereign Lord of all that and that means he's sovereign Lord of the nations because that's why they quote Psalm 2.

Right? That's why. Psalm 2's a messianic psalm. Why do the nations rage and conspire together against Jesus, against your anointed one? You are sovereign Lord of all the nations.

Why do we place our hands upon an insignificant pastor in the midst of a country that is so set against the good news of Jesus Christ because there is more power coursing through the veins of that pastor by the Holy Spirit of God than there is in all the forces of evil that can sometimes permeate governance of our land?

He is sovereign Lord of all the nations. Every nation. Sovereign Lord over all the nations. That's why they quote Psalm 2.

Here's the great thing as well. He's sovereign Lord over the whole history of salvation. Sovereign Lord. You know, just a few weeks before, Jesus was amongst these people and here's what it says, for truly in this city they were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed.

[25 : 05] Herod was there. Pontius Pilate was there. The Gentiles were there. The peoples of Israel were there. They thought they had the power. They thought they had the control. They thought they were silencing Jesus.

That's what they thought they were doing. We'll put them on a cross. We'll make them die. You know, a criminal's death. That's what we'll do. And then even, you know, because some of his followers are so committed to him and they keep talking about resurrection, we'll post guards around the tomb and we'll seal the tomb and he'll be dead and he'll be gone and he'll be history.

But he's the sovereign Lord of history. You know, we don't write history. He does. We understand history in the light of what God is doing.

And so, the incredible thing is they turn around and this is their prayer. Remember, this is how they're praying. This is the words of their prayer. And they say, you know, these guys were set against your anointed to do, look what it says, whatever your hand.

And whatever your plan had predestined to take place. God was working on his plan.

[26 : 30] Who put Jesus on the cross? He went of his own volition. Why? Because only in Christ laying down his life as the perfect sacrifice could there be atonement for the sin of the world.

God was working on his plan. So, it's this sovereign Lord over all of creation. It's this sovereign Lord over all the nations.

It's this sovereign Lord over all of the history of salvation that delivers for you and for me. If through conviction of sin and repentance and faith all our trust is in him, it's this sovereign Lord that they now turn to and say, so here's our circumstances.

Is that not a great way to pray? Right? Sovereign Lord, so here's our circumstances. That's what they do. Right? Sovereign Lord, here is our circumstances.

And listen to what they say. I love this prayer. And so now Lord, that Lord, right? Same God. Now Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.

[28 : 10] Right? Is that not a beautiful way to pray? Right? Look upon their threats. And he doesn't say, Lord, silence them and wipe them out because they need the gospel.

They need the message of Jesus. They too, Christ has died for. Look upon their threats. Lord, we're just, we're just putting a little marker in heaven.

there are people who are against us and you know that because you're the sovereign Lord of our days. You're the sovereign Lord of our moments.

You're the sovereign Lord of our experience. I've got a little phrase that I often say, nothing is wasted in the economy of God because he is a sovereign Lord in the midst of all of it.

Look upon our threats. We need a bigger vision of Jesus, my friends. Look upon the threats and grant to your servants, this is what I love, to continue to speak the word of God with boldness.

[29 : 27] to continue to speak the word of God with boldness. That's why it's word-based evangelism.

All right? Keep opening the word of God. Keep opening the message of Jesus. Keep opening the message of salvation in every moment. Keep speaking about the only one who can make sense of all of this.

Do you know what I love? They understand what they can do and they understand what God can do.

They understand what they can do and they understand what God can do and they don't get the two mixed up. Look what it says in verse 29.

Grant to your servants continue to speak your word with all boldness. But look at verse 30. While you, that's God, while you stretch out your hand to heal and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.

[30 : 41] There is one thing that you and I can always do and that is to faithfully sow the word of God in a person's heart and life. Faithfully. We can do that. We can speak the word of God.

Only God, the Holy Spirit, can take that word and do something miraculous and something powerful and something life-transforming in the person's life. We cannot do anything about that.

But God can and God does. How did you come to faith? Somebody sowed the seed of the word of God in your heart and life. Probably, for many of you, it might even have been sown over many, many years.

And then one day, the word that is sown, boom, God has opened blind eyes. God has transformed the life. God, sometimes in miraculous ways, has completely and utterly changed every situation, every circumstance.

But we understand what we can do and what God can do. You know, some people get themselves, you know, all out of sorts because they think they can do what only God can do.

[31 : 46] But their prayer's beautiful. Lord, give us boldness. Give us courage. Let us do what you have said we can do. In the power of the Spirit, we can be his witnesses.

We can speak a word for Jesus. We can speak the word of God in our hearts and lives, but God can take that work and do the supernatural work. It is God who is able.

to transform. This is the sovereign God of every moment, of every day.

You know, one of the little prayers that I find myself praying pretty much every day, and certainly every day I remember, is this, Sovereign Lord, help me to meet today the people that you are working in to draw to yourself.

Help me to meet today the people that you are working in to draw to yourself. Because I understand God's doing that. He's a sovereign Lord. I understand that He delights to use people like you and me in that process.

[33 : 03] And if I can be in step with God in meeting the people that God is working in their lives to draw to Himself, hallelujah, that's a good day. That's a good day.

And look what happens. I'm going to close this down just here, but verse 31. And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled afresh with the Holy Spirit of God, and continued to speak the Word of God with boldness.

There's a quick answer to a prayer, isn't there? Right? Sometimes we wonder why, you know, it takes some time, but there they are at the end of the prayer meeting.

The place is shaken, such as the, you know, the life, the power, the movement of the Ruach of God, such is the occasion that the place in which they're praying is shaken, and they immediately go out and they continue to do exactly as they'd asked, ask and you shall receive.

What was the ask? Help us to continue to speak the Word of God with great boldness, and so they got up and they continued to speak the Word of God with great boldness. You know, I once had the privilege, well, I've had a number of opportunities to preach up in the Isle of Lewis, and on one occasion I got a little tour of one or two of the places where God moved in revival in that land.

[34 : 43] Do you know what the people did? The people did what they could. They spoke the Word of God in people's hearts and lives. Do you know what God did? God showed up in power prayer and did the most incredible things. And I remember standing outside the house where many people had gathered for prayer and they had this Acts 4 experience.

It's well documented, it's well recorded, in the midst of the Lewis revivals that at the end of it the place in which they were praying was shaken. Now, some of us would actually kind of almost want just to see that happen, just to satisfy our curiosity.

I was not like that, I was just thinking, what does it take for a people to be so convinced of the sovereign power of God that they cry out to God for a boldness and a courage in the people of God to make known the good news of Jesus Christ that God might show up in their island in miraculous and powerful ways in the saving of souls?

That was much more impressive to me than the house shaking. Right? Because some of us can chase the experience. So later, I was preaching in the town hall and I preached on Moses, my servant, is dead.

You now, Joshua. And I was preaching to a group of young people and I said this, Duncan Campbell is dead. You now. Because what we want is the experience of God today.

[36 : 07] What we want is the power of God today. What we want is the move of God today. We don't want to live in yesterday's blessings. We're so thankful to God for His blessings in the past.

But what we want is the mighty move of God today. But that takes a people who understand who their God is. And that takes a people who understand that He's sovereign.

And that takes a people who are bold enough in the first place. You know what amazes me? Their boldness amazes me. I'm amazed at the boldness with which they spoke the Word of God.

But I'm amazed at the boldness that goes into the presence of the sovereign Lord and says, Lord, make us bold. Make us courageous. Because you know what God tends to do with a surrendered life?

Answer their prayer. Answer their prayer. So it's not, will we be bold enough?

[37 : 12] It's are we bold enough? Are we bold enough to go into the presence of God and say, Lord, sovereign Lord, give us the boldness.

Give us the courage. We'll do what we can do. Lord, Lord, would you do what only you can do. Might we even one day, someday, know an Acts 4 experience of the power of God at work.

Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we thank you for your Word. Our gracious Father, we thank you for the example of Peter and John.

Sovereign Lord, give us a vision of who you are. Give us the boldness to pray, make us bold, make us courageous. Enable us, Lord God, this week to be looking for the people that you in your sovereignty are drawing to yourself and enable us to speak your Word into their hearts, into their lives with great boldness, with great courage for your glory.