

Responding rightly to opposition

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[0 : 0 0] Our reading this evening is from the book of Acts. We are reading chapter 4 and the first 31 verses of the chapter.

So Acts chapter 4 beginning at verse 1. The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people.

They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John and because it was evening they put them in jail until the next day.

But many who heard the message believed, so the number of men who believed grew to about 5,000. The next day the rulers and elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem.

Annas, the high priest, was there and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them.

[1 : 0 7] By what power or what name did you do this? Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, Rulers and elders of the people, If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel.

It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved. Then, when they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished, and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together.

What are we going to do with these men, they asked. Everyone living in Jerusalem knows that they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it.

[2 : 3 3] But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name. Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

But Peter and John replied, Which is right in God's eyes, to listen to you or to him? You be the judges. As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.

After further threats, they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened.

For the man who was miraculously healed was over 40 years old. On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.

When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. Sovereign Lord, they said, You made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them.

[3 : 41] You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David. Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.

Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.

They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus. After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Amen. Amen. So, Acts chapter 4.

[4 : 51] I do have those verses open in front of you if you're able to. The book of Acts as a whole, Acts kind of illustrates for us the unstoppable power of the gospel, showing us over and over again that nothing can prevent the good news from spreading and from bearing fruit.

Imagine, most of you probably are familiar with the Hulk. Whether you're familiar, you know, from the original comic books or the newer Avengers films, the Hulk starts out as this mild-mannered scientist but transforms into a raging green beast.

Whenever Dr. Banner is under threat, out comes the Hulk. Now, the Hulk is a good guy to have on your side, isn't he? There's risks to having him on your side. You know, he might go off in the wrong direction but he is basically unstoppable.

Striding through the battle, bullets pinging off him left and right, scattering the attackers to either side and when he does eventually get stunned by something, falling out of a plane, I think, does it, you know, knocks him out for a couple of minutes.

He still stands up and keeps going. The book of Acts, I think, presents the gospel in a not completely dissimilar fashion. The gospel in this book is spreading.

[6 : 05] The obstacles and the barriers keep appearing. The bullets are flying. Attacks coming against God's servants. The opposition grows and grows and over and over again as you go through the book of Acts, you find yourself thinking, surely that's the end.

It's all over. The church is down and it's not getting back up again. You think this, just in time for God's power to be displayed once again.

The gospel crosses over boundaries. It marches on in the face of opposition time and time again. And today's passage, Acts chapter 4, is kind of the beginning of that pattern, if you like.

This is the first real opposition to the gospel. And what we find in Acts chapter 4 is that proclamation leads almost inevitably to opposition.

Proclamation leads to opposition. But the question then is how we respond to that opposition. And we find in chapter 4 two responses. First, opposition leads back to proclamation.

[7 : 09] And secondly, opposition leads to prayer. So the proclamation leads to the opposition, which then leads to further proclamation and to prayer. Now, this opposition that comes.

This opposition is inevitable, isn't it? It should have come as no surprise to the disciples. It shouldn't surprise us either. It shouldn't surprise us that their ministry is met with opposition.

Because Jesus' ministry was the same, wasn't it? A mixture of acceptance from some and violent opposition from others that, you know, grows and culminates eventually in his arrest and crucifixion.

And therefore, identifying themselves as his followers, well, the disciples should expect mixed results too, shouldn't they? And indeed, Jesus promised them exactly that.

As he prepared them for their ministry after his death, speaking to them in the upper room, he said to his disciples, in this world, you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world.

[8 : 13] So they should have been expecting trouble and so should you and I. In this world, we will have trouble. And for the Sadducees who confronted Peter and John at this point in the narrative, for them, the big issue was that they were preaching the resurrection of the dead.

That's what verse 2 tells us. This is the problem, preaching the resurrection of the dead. Now, whilst most Jews did believe, at least in theory, that the dead would be raised to life when the Messiah came, the key thing about the Sadducees is that they did not believe this.

That was their kind of particular pet issue, if you like. Their sticking point. But the objections to what the apostles are teaching are wider ranging than this, aren't they?

Notice that the whole Sanhedrin, the religious ruling council, that the whole of them object to their teaching. They were greatly disturbed, we're told, not least because, well, because teaching people was supposed to be their job.

They don't want these upstarts coming in and doing what should be their role. Whatever it might be, the truth is people are always going to find things to object to.

[9 : 24] And we find that today, too, don't we? We find that the world will tolerate the church only when it's the type of church that it finds tolerable. The church that the world likes is the qualifying church.

The church that says, perhaps, maybe, it could be. The church that constantly says, we're not being dogmatic. The church that's okay with, you believe that and I'll believe this over here.

The politicians, the world leaders, they're more than happy to accept the church as an ally, but only on their terms. Only when the church's proclamations match their own.

Beloved of the world is the church that's strong on social involvement, as long as that social involvement doesn't extend to criticism of social policy, of course, strong on social involvement, but weak on proclamation.

That church is quite popular, isn't it? Very popular, the church that never stands up and says, this is wrong. That never wants to challenge anything. And the church might well have a seat at the table at COP26, provided that she will declare climate change to be the most important issue facing the world today, provided that we will talk in terms of, you know, salvation from the rising seas.

[10 : 41] Never mind salvation from eternal damnation. A church that wants to say, actually, there is something even more pressing, even more urgent than a changing climate.

Well, that church isn't quite so welcome. Folks, when the world says, we love your type of church, we love your style of Christianity, that is when the alarm bells have to start ringing.

We should worry if we're not encountering opposition. It's a worrying sign when everyone has nothing bad to say about us.

Now, I'm not saying that that means, you know, we should expect everyone that we speak to to be offended. Certainly not that we should, you know, actively seek to cause offense. But what I am saying is we should expect to find a mixed bag, a variety of responses, a variety of results.

And as with the apostles, what we have to take care is that it is, it is the gospel that people object to, not our manner, something else that we say alongside.

[11 : 53] Our charge is to say those hard things, to offer the challenges, but to do so in a loving manner, with a helpful attitude that is seeking to convert, seeking to persuade, seeking to enlighten, not to condemn.

But it's clear from these verses that even having done those things, even with those positive attitudes, opposition will come. And the question then is, how do we respond to that opposition when it arises?

Now, the first thing to note about responding to opposition is that that opposition cannot prevent the spread of the gospel.

Before the convening of the court and before Peter's response to the opposition that he faces, Luke includes in verse 4 an important aside. There is good news. Luke makes sure he records here that despite the opposition from the religious leaders, many who heard the message believed.

So the number of men who believed grew to about 5,000. The progress of the gospel is unstoppable. The community of believers has been growing steadily through the first few chapters of Acts, and it will continue to do so through the rest of the narrative and indeed down through history.

[13 : 16] today, as Peter stands up, today is no exception today as Peter stands there is no exception to that unstoppable growth and neither is today as I stand here or tomorrow as you stand before your work colleagues.

The progress of the gospel is unstoppable. Nothing can hinder God. How could the actions of any men, however powerful those men might be on a human scale?

You know, the Sanhedrin is a significant force. However powerful they might be, how could they possibly frustrate the purposes of God? We know this, don't we?

We know that nothing can prevent God from doing what He intends. We know that the power of the gospel is unstoppable and yet, and yet, we forget it. We don't act as if it's true.

We act as if, you know, we need to bolster up the power as if it depends on our strength. So yes, it's very clear that when the gospel is proclaimed sooner or later, there will be opposition, but it's also clear that no amount of opposition can ultimately prevent the salvation of those whom God has called.

[14 : 35] This is because God is more powerful than any other agency. He saves in spite of circumstances. He chooses to use His Holy Spirit to empower His people to faithful proclamation in the face of opposition.

That is the means of the unstoppable force of the gospel. It's people who stand up and make that proclamation just as Peter does here.

Encountering opposition, it should always lead us back to proclamation because the Spirit empowers people to speak the truth. The Spirit doesn't empower us to cower in silence.

So here, having put Peter and Paul in prison overnight, the religious leaders then convene their court. They gather together all of the important people to come and decide what to do with these upstarts. And they start with this simple question, verse 7, by what power or name did you do this?

You know, they can't deny that there has been a miraculous healing. The man standing there in front of them, they know him from of old. They know that something amazing has happened.

[15 : 40] All they can do is question, well, how has this come about? But opposition, opposition has to lead to proclamation. And it does so here despite the echoes of Jesus' trial.

Do you see how the narrative flows through here to show us these parallels? Verse 8, Peter, empowered by the Spirit, he begins to respond. Peter, remember, Peter, the man who, while Jesus was on trial, wouldn't even admit to the high priest's serving girl that he knew Jesus.

This same Peter, he now proclaims Christ to the high priest himself. Once he wouldn't talk to the serving girl, now he speaks to the man. We would expect, wouldn't we, we would expect, genuinely, that, you know, that the fear would increase before a court with this kind of power.

You would think the memory of Jesus' trial running around in Peter's head thinking, is this the end for me too? But when Peter opens his mouth, he's not on the defensive.

He's on the front foot. He's empowered to speak. He doesn't cringe and desperately try to defend themselves. No, Peter has this message to proclaim and the points of his message are abundantly clear.

[16 : 56] Point one, Jesus of Nazareth is responsible for this healing. No, the paralytic didn't heal himself. No, Peter didn't do it. God is responsible.

Point one. Point two, Jesus is alive and in the place of authority. They, the Sanhedrin, all Israel with them, they crucified Jesus and yet God raised him from the dead.

Peter quotes their own scriptures to them. Jesus, the chief cornerstone in God's building, the one central to the fulfillment of his purposes and yet, third, he is the one they rejected.

He's not pulling any punches, is he? He's not soft peddling the gospel. He's not, you know, letting them shift the blame. No, this is the one that you rejected.

And then finally, to make it completely clear, Jesus is the unique savior. Verse 12, the one who raised this man and gave him the ability to walk.

[17 : 59] He is the one who will lead God's people to the center of all of God's purposes, who will announce forgiveness of sins and who will pour out the gift of the Holy Spirit. And so, Peter's conclusion, there is only one way to God.

Jesus is that way to reject him is to reject God. It's a bold message, isn't it? Unashamed in the face of opposition.

And as in his earlier sermons in Acts, Peter's completely uncompromising. What he says is evidently unpopular. He knows that what he says here is likely to get him into more trouble.

But there's still no shift of direction. There's no downplaying, there's no softening, there's no giving in. Peter says the same things here as he said in his Pentecost sermon and as he said in the immediately preceding sermon to the crowd after the healing back in chapter 3.

Verse 10 repeats this same formula. Jesus Christ whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead. This is the central figure and this is your role in it, he says.

[19 : 11] You crucified him. Now, that is not quite as true of people today in a literal sense, is it? You know, we don't stand up in the marketplace and say, you were there two days ago shouting for him to be crucified.

And yet, the underlying reality is still the same, isn't it? That it is still our sins, the sins of the whole world that made Jesus' death necessary.

And it is still true that the rebelliousness of every human being who ever lived. That the truth is, were we there at that moment, we'd have been stood there clamoring for his death.

Peter is uncompromising. This man whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead. The good news follows on.

So, opposition must lead to proclamation. Nothing can turn Peter away from that. Not this fear arising from the parallels with Jesus' trial and neither his own lack of education.

[20 : 26] Verse 13, that the court recognized they have no training, no special education. The court themselves recognize, well, they couldn't have done this on their own. Even they are astonished at how they speak.

God's power is shown in Peter's own weakness. My friends, the same is true today, isn't it? that God's power is shown in our weakness.

That when we falter and stumble and fall, when we admit that we haven't got quite the words to say to persuade people, when we come away from these conversations knowing, I didn't really express that the way that I meant to.

God's power is displayed in our weakness. That doesn't mean it's wrong to seek education. It doesn't mean it's wrong to want training.

And in fact, we can tell that yes, Peter and his friends, they weren't trained scribes, but Peter knows his Old Testament well enough to quote from it, just off the hoof.

[21 : 31] He knows what to say. There's Old Testament references throughout this sermon here. He's taken the time to study. It isn't wrong to study, but it is very wrong to think that you need special training before you can speak.

Anyone can proclaim the gospel because it will be the work of the Spirit through you empowering you. So, if you've ever been inclined to think that you don't know enough, or to think that you're not a good enough public speaker, that you're not well enough educated, well, God's unstoppable gospel goes forth here in the book of Acts on the lips of ordinary men and women, unschooled as they are.

So, opposition must lead to proclamation. Peter's not stopped by fear. He's not stymied by the lack of education, and he is not deterred by the hard-heartedness of his hearers.

We almost start to wonder, don't we, how could this court continue to reject the gospel? Because remember, the man who's been healed is standing there before them. They can see this power at work.

They have nothing to say in opposition to that, and yet, sadly, even the miraculous is not self-authenticating, is it? Unless there is an openness of heart and mind that is completely absent here amongst the Sadducees, their preoccupation with protecting their vested interests, it shuts them off from seeing the miracle that's happened.

[23 : 04] It shuts them off from seeing God at work. And yet, despite the hard-heartedness of this part of his audience, the right response for Peter is still proclamation, still to declare the truth, hoping that some, that any, might respond.

And in God's providence, well, that proclamation is recorded for us, and who knows what impact it has had down through the years. Opposition must lead to proclamation.

Peter isn't stopped by fear, isn't stopped by lack of education, isn't stopped by the disinterest of his hearers. Why? Nothing can turn Peter away from proclaiming the gospel because he was empowered by the Holy Spirit, verse 8, and because he is obedient to God, not to men.

In response to the council's demand that he be silent, Peter answers verse 19, which is right in God's eyes, to listen to you or to him?

You be the judges. You can imagine the response in that courtroom, can't you? The Sanhedrin are apoplectic at this point, aren't they?

[24 : 23] Because in their minds, obedience to God and obedience to them, these are one and the same thing. It's their job to interpret the scriptures. It's their job to determine rules for those around them.

They have all of the authority as far as they're concerned. But Peter knows he is subject to a higher authority. We're constantly surrounded, aren't we, by different authorities, different people who think that they have all of the power in a situation.

And many of these authorities are hostile to the gospel and expect from us our silence. Whether these are formal authorities, whether they're national level, whether it's a local organization, whether it's people in charge at work, all of these authorities think that they have the right to tell us what to say and what to do.

Well, judge for yourselves whether it's right in God's sight to obey them rather than God. The Spirit empowers Peter to proclamation, not to silence. He cannot be silent.

And this is always the case that the Spirit empowers boldness, not silence. silence. Maybe you've heard people say, maybe you've been tempted to say yourself, I just keep quiet and let my life do the talking.

[25 : 42] I've used it as an excuse from time to time myself. That's all it is, an excuse. The Spirit works through the bold proclamation of the gospel, not through silence.

So yes, our lives should adorn the gospel, but our lives do not themselves clearly proclaim the gospel. This miraculous healing of the lame man, it led to amazement.

That's back in chapter 3, verse 10, it records the amazement of the people at the healing of this lame man. But it took Peter's preaching to bring people beyond amazement to faith.

And if we're honest, we know this is true in ourselves too, that our lives might at their very best might lead people to wonder that we seem to be a little bit different to those around us.

But our lives alone will never answer the question of why. For that, we must speak. We must proclaim the gospel. So nothing could turn Peter away from proclaiming the gospel.

[26 : 50] So folks, be prepared. Proclamation will lead to opposition. It does us no good to pretend otherwise, but the right response to that opposition is bold proclamation in the power of the Spirit.

Never silence. Proclamation leads to opposition, which is necessarily responded to with bold proclamation in turn, but that is not all. See, when Peter and John have been dismissed by this religious court, when they've been told, you know, shut up, go and do something else, well, they went to tell the other believers what had happened.

Peter and John, they don't struggle on alone, they go and tell the rest of the fellowship. And this account, this, you know, kind of going to tell the others what had happened, that could have gone a few different ways, couldn't it?

You know, they could have been congratulated for speaking well, they could have all, you know, shared their anger at the court that would dare to do this, they could have collectively despaired, we've been told to be silent, what can we do now?

But none of that happens, does it? No, they respond immediately in prayer. Why? Well, because they know that God is in charge. Opposition leads to proclamation and opposition leads to prayer.

[28 : 09] And in their prayer, they begin with what God himself has done. We can see them here acknowledging God's power, acknowledging God's sovereignty in this situation, because they begin with what God has done.

Look at verse 24, when they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God, sovereign Lord, they said, you made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them.

They recognize God made the universe, therefore God is in charge, he has absolute control. The mighty works of God, they have been already in Acts, the foundation of proclamation.

What God has done is what is proclaimed to others. And here, those same mighty works are the foundation of prayer. They are the foundation of the believers' lives.

Everything that they do flows from what God has already done. And their prayer then continues from the foundation of the world through intermessianic prophecy.

[29 : 13] These words, verses 25 and 26, these are taken from Psalm 2, showing us the believers recognizing that God knew beforehand what would happen. He planned what would happen. Back in the time of David, this very moment was foreseen.

The Psalm, Psalm 2 recognizes that the world, the nations, are opposed to God, and recognizes that their rebellion is ultimately futile.

They plot in vain. The rest of the Psalm that Peter doesn't quote, but doubtless familiar to these gathered believers, in the rest of the Psalm we hear, the one enthroned in heaven laughs.

The Lord scoffs at the rulers of the world. The gathered might of the nations of the earth, everything that the mighty Roman Empire can muster, everything that can be mustered against God's people today, all of it is laughable before a sovereign, holy God.

the Messiah, we're told, will rule over them with an iron scepter. Because God has absolute power over absolutely everything that this world can muster. Here, verse 27, this is applied directly to the situation that's being faced by these early believers.

[30 : 31] They know right here, this is an instance of what the psalmist described. Now, are we going to be able to see such immediate, such direct parallels in our struggles today?

Maybe. I suspect probably mostly not quite so obviously. But they'll be there all the same. And in any case, the broader points certainly apply that God knows every detail of what will happen, that nothing is outside of his knowledge and control, and that God is sovereign, that he is all-powerful, that therefore everything else is laughable by comparison.

It's a wonderful assurance, isn't it? Verse 28 reminds us, even the evil purposes of these gathered rulers, that they did only what God's power and will had decided, that in their worst excesses, in their most powerful attempts to do away with God's people, that even in that, they were only doing what God had planned in advance, and God brought great good out of the evil acts of those who sent Jesus to the cross, and great good out of the evil acts of those who sought to silence Peter and John.

This opposition that they face would similarly bring about his purposes. This, this knowledge of God's absolute sovereignty and power, this is the engine of our prayer.

This rehearsing of what God has done, this drives our confidence in him. Because if we don't recognize God's mighty works, then what is the basis for our prayer?

[32 : 15] If we don't consider God's needs, how do we know his will? How do we know what to pray for? It's easy, I think, to kind of, you know, treat these things as read.

You know, don't bother saying it because we already know that God is powerful. We know what God has done, so stop wasting our time. Well, maybe you're different to me, but my experience is that functionally I forget these things all the time.

I mean, I don't mean that I wouldn't be able to tell you about God's deeds in history. I don't mean that I don't get excited about this pinnacle of salvation history of Christ's death on the cross.

Of course I know these things, of course I can tell you about them, but they're not at the forefront of my mind all the time. It's not what I'm thinking about when I wake up in the morning. I wake up musing about what I'm going to get done during the day and considering what to have for breakfast.

But the best days are when I stop and remind myself what God has done. I want to take a step back from the day and look to God. The same is true of our days and the same is true of our prayers.

[33 : 24] Now, when I sit down to pray, if I don't start by praising God, I get distracted so quickly. Unless I remind myself who God is, then I forget why I'm praying.

I mean, that's not to say that beginning in praise is a guarantee of distraction-free prayer. It isn't, but it certainly helps. Because the foundation of our prayer is God, his power, his deeds, his love, his promises.

And the believers' prayers here are shaped by and are on the basis of what God has said and done. They're suffused with Holy Scripture.

Throughout the prayer here in the end of Acts chapter 4 and throughout most of the prayers recorded for us in the Bible, we find the words of Scripture being repeated in prayer.

It's all over the place. The words of the Bible are a great resource for our prayers, aren't they? Where better would we begin in prayer? But do we actually pray with our Bibles open before us?

[34 : 30] Or is there, when the Connect Group leader announces the end of the study and the start of a time of prayer, is there that chorus of snaps as the Bibles close all around the room? Do we not think there might be something worth praying about in what we've just read?

Or what we've just considered in our prayer meetings? Or at the end of a sermon? Or when we've been reading God's Word on our own, our reading and our prayers, surely they should be profoundly connected, not to independent activities.

I mean, say you've just been reading Acts chapter 4 in your quiet time. And say your list that you've pre-prepared of what you're going to pray about on this given day. Your list of things to pray about says to pray for dear Aunt Maud with her surgery coming up this week.

Well, put those two things together. If you put Acts chapter 4 and Aunt Maud's surgery together, well, aren't you then move to pray not only for a successful surgery, but also that she will be bold to proclaim good news in the opportunities that she has before her coming up, and that she'll know the truths of what God has done in the past, and therefore that she will prayerfully depend on Him in the challenges that these days have ahead for her.

The content of our prayers can be so profitably shaped by what in God's gracious providence we've encountered in His Word each day. And so they begin their prayers with what God has already done.

[35 : 55] And as we continue through the prayer to verses 29 and 30, we see that what they pray is then in line with God's will. They've considered what He's done, they've spent time with Jesus, they've listened to God's commands, they know what to pray for.

Now, there's nothing wrong per se with general, non-specific prayers. Sometimes that's all we have. But when we can be concrete, when we know the specific thing to pray for, then we should be concrete.

The believer's prayer here, it's not, Lord, let your will be done. They know God's will. They pray, verse 29, Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

They know what they need. It's not airy-fairy. No, they need boldness to do the work that they've been called to. Now, is that our prayer when we're facing opposition to the gospel?

Because do you see what this is not? This isn't a prayer for personal strength. This isn't, oh, God, please get me through this. It's not, God, please deal with my oppressors.

[37 : 03] It's not, God, keep me safe from these people. No, their concern here is for God's glory. And their concern is for the proclamation of the gospel, not for their personal safety.

They pray for boldness in the face of the threats of their oppressors. Verse 30, they go on to pray for miracles. I wonder what miracle you'd pray for in that situation.

Lord, strike down these evil men? No. Lord, put them in their place? No. No, they pray for miracles of mercy. They pray for more healings, more signs and wonders.

God's mercy on suffering people, signs and wonders to authenticate the message that they proclaim. The final verse of Psalm 2 talks about turning to the Son, turning to the Messiah.

Blessed are all who take refuge in him. Jesus does offer refuge and protection, but not the kind of protection of cowering away from the world. Protection as we boldly proclaim.

[38 : 01] And their prayer wonderfully is immediately answered. Verse 31 tells us after they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

They pray, God answers. Verse 12 of chapter 5 is probably a fulfillment of the prayer for miracles as well. They pray, God answers. God always answers prayer.

He doesn't usually do it by shaking the room. But if you pray genuinely for boldness to preach in the name of Jesus, do you imagine for a moment that you will not be filled with the Spirit and enabled to do that?

You will. Prayer isn't weak. Prayer is not the last resort of the feeble. No, prayer is the engine that drives us.

In prayer we come to a mighty God, an almighty God. And in response to our prayers we receive the Holy Spirit. So why? Why do we so often keep prayer for the last resort when every other attempt has failed?

[39 : 11] I mean they say there's no atheist on a plane that's about to crash because everyone will be praying. Well maybe, but why wait for such an extreme? See what God's done in history.

God, the mighty creator of the universe, he welcomes us to come before him in the name of his son and to call him our father. We talk to the one who knew everything that would ever be before any of it ever was.

We call on the name of the sovereign Lord, the one before whom kings and queens are as nothing. Elizabeth, our queen, has reigned for almost 70 years.

Now that is a great achievement to be sure and yet she is as nothing before the king of the universe. The nations are an inheritance for Jesus. The ends of the earth are his possession.

He rules them with an iron scepter. So face with opposition. The opposition that will surely come. Will you back down? Will you try and stand in your own strength?

[40 : 12] Will you try and prove yourself? Or will you instead come to the mighty king of kings in prayer? Reminding ourselves of who he is, of what he's done.

Asking for boldness to proclaim the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and faithfully, unswervingly, holding out the glorious truths of the gospel to a dying world.

Well let's pray that we will. Sovereign Lord, Holy God, creator of all things, our Lord Jesus Christ, the firstborn over all creation, by him all things created, things in heaven and on earth, things visible and invisible, the thrones, the powers, the rulers, the authorities, all created by him and for him.

Lord God, we thank you that the same son who flung stars into space, you sent him to surrender to the cross. We thank you again for his sacrifice.

We ask that the knowledge of your power and your authority might sustain us in the face of those who oppose your word. that you have poured out your spirit. May he give us boldness to proclaim your name, to proclaim your name in every corner of the earth, but less grandly than that, to proclaim your name in the places to which you actually send us, in the places where we are every day, to boldly proclaim the name of Jesus.

[41 : 51] Empower us, we pray. Amen.