

Where to Turn in Time of Need

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[0 : 0 0] Acting on yesterday, last evening, and the vote that we have a God who so graciously cares for his people. In verse 4, it speaks about what is man in the midst of the heavens and the glory of God. What is man that you should give him thought, the son of man, that you to him such gracious care have brought.

But we're thankful to have a God who cares and has compassion on his people. As we turn back to Acts chapter 4, we're going to look at the section that we read here, beginning at verse 23 and down to the end of the chapter.

And what we see here is the early church and how growth came. And when you think about it, you might think, well, it must have been a time of peace, a time of freedom, a time when Christianity was just the dominant religion of the day, when it was easy to be a Christian, but it was far from it.

As you see here, there was persecution in their midst. It was coming more and more powerfully, more strongly as they were going on. But as somebody said, writing about this, persecution rather than thwarting the Christian faith, it led to its expansion.

The Christian faith expanded out to all ends of the earth. And that glorious good news of the gospel went out. Now, a couple of weeks ago on the Sunday evening, we were looking at Colossians and just putting across that idea of what it was like to live in Colossae in the time of Paul, when there were so many different things going on.

[1 : 4 5] And I mentioned other places, what would it have been like to live in certain places? And you think to yourself, well, here's another example of what would it have been like to live here in the days of the apostles in the early church in Jerusalem, as they were being instructed, as they were seeing the day of Pentecost, as they were seeing persecution arising.

What would it have been like to live in that place and to see these things happening? You can enter into it in some ways, the experiences that they went through.

And especially maybe as you come into this passage when they were released, it says in verse 23, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and elders had said to them.

So there was a small gathering of them and they gathered to pray. So we think about ourselves together this evening, just a small gathering of God's people.

We gather together to pray and we're in exactly the same situation as they were then. With all that's going on around us, with all that's going on in our society, in our world, in all that's going on, we still come to an extraordinary God, a sovereign God, a gracious God, who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or imagine.

[3 : 1 3] And they had seen extraordinary things. When you think of the day of Pentecost, what it was like to see the Spirit poured out and 3,000 being added to the number of those who were being saved just a chapter before.

And you think of all the healings and so much that was being seen around them. But in the midst of that, you see, it wasn't all sunshine and roses. There was this persecution that was coming in as well.

And so often the case that when things aren't going well or are going well, when people are professing faith, there's always opposition. Satan will not be inactive in these times.

He's always prowling like a roaring lion, as the word describes. He's always there to try and devour and use any means possible to turn people against the word of God.

And so here we see that coming in a very powerful way. Persecution. What is it like?

[4 : 21] In many ways, we don't know for ourselves what a serious persecution is like. But in many ways, we see places in the world where it is so, where God's people are persecuted for their faith.

And that means imprisonment. It means beatings. In some cases, it means death. That's the nature of persecution. When there's this active power and force against the church of God.

And perhaps we're seeing it in a small measure now, more and more in our own nation. Subtly, dangerously, persecution coming in.

When we think of yesterday and that vote for the assisted dying bill, how dangerous, how evil, how wicked that is.

And it's just another way of taking the gospel, the Christian faith, how taking that out of society, taking out of our leadership, our parliaments, and all of these things. It's what happens when we take God out.

[5 : 29] Anything else, it can come in. And so it comes. But what do we do when all of these things are going on?

Where do we go? Where do we turn to when all of these things are happening? That's what I want to think about this evening. When we think of all that's going on, all the different ideologies of our day and how it rejects the Christian faith, where can we go?

Where can we turn to? And that's what we see in this passage, a reminder of where we go. And there's three places we can turn to. Three ways that we can make sure that we are focused on the right things.

It's natural to react with a sense of anger and frustration in the midst of everything that's going on. I'm sure we all feel that at times. And even when we think of those who voted for this bill to go through, how would you speak to one of these people if you met them outside here tonight?

Would it be with anger? Would it be with hatred? Would it be shouting abuse in their face? Or would we have the courage to say something of the Lord Jesus to them?

[6 : 41] To preach the gospel in some way and to see, do you not see how you're going against God and the danger of that? How do we respond? Well, three ways that we can respond as we see in this passage.

And the first is what we are doing here tonight. And what we see them doing here in this passage. Where did they turn? First of all, they turned to their own.

They turned to their own people. They made sure that they were together as God's people. And that's the first thing that we see here in verse 23. When they were released, they went to their friends and reported that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

So they turned to their own. When Peter and John were released from being held by the chief priests and the rulers of the day, they turned to their own.

To those who they were on the same page with. To those who they were sure that they would be together in that sense of being one. It could easily have been that they would have turned away from everything that was going on.

- [7 : 52] They could have easily thought that was a close shave. We could have been imprisoned. We could have been held because of what we were teaching, what we were preaching.
- And they could have said things are going to turn nasty now. It's time to get out of this place. Time to get away from Jerusalem. Time to maybe find a quieter place for ourselves. But that's not the response that they had.
- Instead of thinking it's the end of their witnessing, they realize this is just the beginning. And for ourselves, maybe that's something we realize today as well.
- This is not the end of our witness to God, to his sovereignty, to his power, to his grace towards us. In some ways, it's another beginning for us to realize the slide that our nation has seen.
- And that we would be turned up and stirred up together. They turned to their own, to their brothers and sisters in Christ, not to warn them of the need to get away, but instead the need to be together in this.
- [9 : 05] We see that in verse 23. Just how it speaks about that sense of friends and being together in this place. And when they heard it, they lifted up their voices together.
- There was a sense of togetherness in this moment. And that's what the church, the people of God need at this time.
- A sense of togetherness, a sense of oneness in the midst of all that's going on. When persecution arises, how are we going to react? When we see in Matthew's gospel, as Jesus is teaching the parable of the sword and the seed, you see the response is there, where the word has taken root, it bears fruit.
- But it says in verse 20, When trouble or persecution comes.
- That's often the test for the Christian faith. It can be easy to be a Christian when things are going fine, when things are going well. But what about when troubles and persecution arise?
- [10 : 27] That's when we find out if we are rooted in the word of God. Because if we're not, we fall away. What we see with the people here is that they were rooted in the word of God.
- They didn't shrink away. They didn't turn away. They encouraged one another. They were together in one mind. They had all things in common, as we see as it goes on in verse 32 down there.
- They had everything in common. That word in common just means they were of one mind. There was this bond, this strength of unity in the Christian body. And that's what we need today.
- Hebrews chapter 10 verse 23. Again, it's just that reminder to be together as one. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess. For here promised is faithful.
- Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing. But let us encourage one another.
- [11 : 31] To bear on all the more as you see the day approaching. To realize the days in which we live. The day approaching there is the day of the Lord.

And to know a day is coming when judgment will come. We all have to appear before him. and so that stirs us on encourages us together that we continue to meet together and to encourage one another and to remember who we are praying to these are days of great need and when it speaks about unity here and purpose together it's not the sense and we're going to agree on everything with everybody we know we don't we know we have different ways of looking at things and understanding things but in the key area where we recognize who jesus christ is and his lordship over us and our need to appear before him one day that should stir us up we don't make christian clones as someone described it we're not all identical in our thinking and our ways but we all have christ in common and so we're encouraged to be together we turn to one another we encourage one another and then the second thing you see in this is that they turned to god they turned to god in verse 24 when they heard it they lifted up their voices together to god and said sovereign lord who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them and when we see this we are reminded again of just who we have to come to who we offer up our prayers to as was prayed it's not just the voices of those who are praying loudly in this place playing out loud it's the voices of all of us together we all lift up our voices together to god we lift them up in our singing in our praise but our voices are heard by god as we pray even as we pray in our silently in our heads together we pray for so much but we pray to god and nothing galvanizes us in prayer more than need and as i said earlier sometimes it's just the needs that can come to the fore we start with just a list of needs that we have but as we're reminded here we begin with god we turn to god the sovereign lord and in many ways we see here just how they saw god and how we are to see god as well because you see four ways in which they turn to god in praise they praise god first for who he is he is the reason for all their praise he is the one who created the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them so we have this praise to god as who he is he is the creator of all things but you also see how they praise god for his provision who through the mouth of david spoke so that we see there a psalm quoted but then it goes on as well to speak of the provision that god has made 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 are predestined to take place

you see here god has provided and the provision was made in the midst of a world that hated a world that hated god a world that rejected jesus a people who wanted him away and said crucify him crucify him but yet what we see here is the people of god are praising god for the provision that was made and we've prayed that we've heard that prayed already this evening as well the provision that has been made in jesus christ our lord our savior the one who is able to forgive sin even my sin even your sin and the wonder of that so they praise god together for that provision they praise god also for his power you see this in verse 28 and this is talking about god to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place god's hand god's hand god's hand was in the midst of everything that was going on from jesus being crucified from his resurrection from his appearing to them from his ascension up to the heavens from the pouring out of the spirit of pentecost this was all in god's hand all of these great things but they can also say this persecution is also in god's hands he is a god who has great power and so today as we see all of these things taking place even the things that we know are so wrong and so wicked we still know that god's hand is powerful that he can have a plan and a purpose in all of these things he does have a plan and a purpose in all of these things he is a god who is powerful and he is a god of providence it speaks here about your plan had your hand and your plan had predestined to take place all of these things are planned by god it is in his providence that we are here today and these can be hard things for us to understand but yet we still have this god who we can come to and who we can share with others in the 16th century he was a minister in england by the name of hugh latimer and he was known as a great preacher of his day and he had great great great opportunities to speak to those in power and authority do you think what it would be like to preach to king henry the eighth i'm sure if you've heard of him at all you know his reputation he wasn't one who suffered anybody too long if he didn't agree with them they could be dealt with and dealt with very quickly but hugh latimer had an opportunity to preach to him and so he was pondering what will i say he was praying about what will i preach on and the message that came to him as he was praying over it he realized king henry the eighth is not going to like this message but he still thought i must preach it but wasn't this was as he began to preach how he presented it and he said latimer latimer do you remember that you are speaking before the high and mighty king henry the eighth who has power and to command you to be sent to prison and who can have your head cut off of it please him he was saying this out loud before him will you not take care to say nothing that will offend

royal ears so that's how he started but he paused then and continued latimer latimer do you not remember that that you are speaking before the king of kings and the lord of lords before him at whose throne henry the eighth will stand before him to whom one day you will have to give an account yourself latimer latimer latimer he said be faithful to your master and declare all of god's word and so he did he declared the word of god he had the choice to preach what king henry the eighth would have liked or wanted to hear or wanted to hear or to preach christ and so he preached christ latimer latimer latimer was later martyred for his faith and for his presentation of the gospel but we have that same opportunity today for that boldness not to be afraid to present the gospel the word of god that's what they were doing in this passage that's what they were doing in this day that they would have boldness to continue to proclaim the word of god as you see there in verse 31 to speak the word of god with boldness let's not be afraid to speak the word of god with boldness and what you see here is as they are together and they're recognizing who they are looking to that they are looking to god and it says in verse 31 when they had prayed the place in which they were gathered together was shaken and they were filled with the holy spirit and given that boldness to speak we thank god that there are people in both the scottish parliament and westminster who are people of god they may be few but they are praying people and we pray for them that they would be given the courage and boldness to speak and that even as they pray that the walls of parliament would shake that the presence of god would be a real thing to them that the fear of the lord would come upon these places come upon these people and the decisions that they make that they would recognize we are before a mighty a sovereign god before whom one day we will have to give account they turned to god and the final thing that we see here is that they turned to the work how easy it would have been to lose heart how easy it would have been when this persecution was coming when there's this threat towards them to say well we'll just have to get back in our shells and hide away until this passes but as you see as it goes on in verse 32 they went on in faith they went on in the work and the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own they had everything in common there was a sense of togetherness and a sense of god's presence and a sense of need in the midst of those days and don't we recognize that ourselves today as well when we think of those who could be so much impacted by this vote if it was to continue and to go through and we think even of our own community here the weak the vulnerable the aged people who we love and who we care for

should this not make sure that it stirs us up to the work the work of making sure that the gospel is proclaimed that the good news of jesus is heard and known whether it's with young or old or middle-aged whoever it is that these kinds of days would stir us up to make the word of god known recognized and feared you see it in verse 33 how it speaks there with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the lord jesus and great grace was upon them all it wasn't just a case of of feeding the poor in that sense of that they had everything in common and no one was in need the gospel was at the heart of it all the testimony of the resurrection of the lord jesus and the great grace that was upon them isn't it a wonderful thing that we can know that ourselves as we turn our heart and our hands to the work of the gospel of sharing the good news that jesus is risen that we would see great grace come upon all in every place that we pray for in every person that we pray for in every need that we pray for that we would see great grace upon them all we need the grace of god and isn't it wonderful like psalm 8 says that we have a god who remembers us not as we deserve but the son of man that due to him such gracious care have brought that we would have that sense in our hearts of the gracious care that god has for his people so that we would show that and represent that to others because that gracious god can make all the difference in the lives that we see around us so when we represent that gracious god that we would do it with his grace and his compassion and his love that we would see great grace upon others these are our difficulties they're strange times we don't know where the world is going and what's happening but god does he has power in his hand and he has grace unlimited for all and so may we keep together may we be found together as god's people looking to this god and doing the work of our god to see grace upon all remembering god who is sovereign let us pray our father in heaven we do thank you for who you are you are our lord and our god our father in heaven you are sovereign over all you are the one who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all in them and we thank you lord that you remember us in all of these things that even today that you have not forgotten us that you know every burden on our heart that you know the burden for our people far and wide throughout our land today that you know the burden that we have to see your grace upon us and we ask oh lord that you will not forget us that you will remember us and those who

[28 : 02] rule over us that you might have grace and mercy upon them that you would turn their hearts oh lord to be a people who fear the lord and that our parliaments oh lord as we have prayed already would be a place where your wisdom might be proclaimed and where grace might be seen unknown and we pray lord that you will intervene in these days and to turn the tide and to turn us once again towards you lord hear your praying people we thank you that just as in the days of the acts of the apostles when they were together in in small numbers we thank you that they were together in unity with all things in common and we pray lord for that spirit in your people today not just as we are gathered here but as all your people all your praying people even this evening are united so much in prayer may we find that in common that we have that heart for our lord who has done all for us so hear our prayers and pardon our sin that's all we ask we ask in jesus precious name amen we're going to conclude