

Praying For Gospel Boldness

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[0 : 0 0] where we finished reading. And this encompasses the prayer of those who at that time formed the church and were concerned, obviously, for the gospel and the advance of the gospel.

The book of Acts is crucial for the church and every generation. It's not that we set it above any other book of scripture, any other part of scripture, but the book of Acts is the establishing of the church in the age of the Spirit, the age of the Holy Spirit, who came down at Pentecost in accordance with a promise given in the Old Testament scriptures.

And because of that, it's a book that we need to come back to again and again to remind ourselves of what it means really to belong to the church of God, what it means to belong to a church that seeks to go out with the news of the gospel to the world in which God has placed them.

Because this passage itself is a passage where we find such things as imprisonments, intimidation, persecution, threats, all of these things that were faced then and are faced now and are faced in every generation by the people of God as they seek to live faithful lives and commend Christ to the particular time of day that they themselves, the time of history that they themselves actually live in.

And what it did for them here as they were facing such things, it actually fed into their prayers. And one of the things this passage tells us is that they drew from the Old Testament scriptures words which were very relevant, they found relevant, to that aid to these circumstances in which they found themselves here.

[1 : 5 6] Example, Psalm 2 here is quoted there in verses 25 and 26. Well, they went back to Psalm 2 and found in Psalm 2 a very apt description, a very relevant portion of God's word to apply to their own generation.

And that, by the way, is a reminder to us that we don't have two testaments, as you were, in our Bibles that are cut off from each other. The one flows into the other as God revealed himself down through the ages as the one God to his one covenant people.

There's no church in the Old Testament then cut off, and there's a new church in the New Testament. It is God's church, God's redeemed people, God's covenant people, all the way through history.

But, of course, changes are effected by the likes of the coming of Christ himself and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to have the church now in the age of the Spirit, the age of fulfillment of all things following the death and resurrection of Christ himself.

And Psalm 2 is relevant because it speaks about the antagonism against the Lord's people by the powers of the world, the political powers, even the religious powers of the world.

[3 : 1 3] And God's response to that is also set out in Psalm 2 and quoted here in these two verses. Now, verse 18, you first of all find orders given against gospel teaching.

How relevant is that? Orders given against gospel teaching. As you see there in verse 18, the rulers called the people and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

And that charge or that order against gospel teaching is really acting against the evidence. You know, one of the things that's really frustrating but understandable in the light of Scripture is that when you present the gospel, when you witness to the gospel, when you actually speak to people about their soul and about the Lord and about all that the gospel is, you'll find that so often they actually go against what evidence is provided by God, sometimes very clear evidence of his work.

For example, verse 16 here, verse 16 speaks about the miracle done to the man who had been healed. So when they came in verse 14, seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition, but then commanded them to leave the council they conferred, and they asked each other then, this is still the authorities, what shall we do with these men?

For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. And then, of course, instead of saying, well, let's consider this more, let's give this more of our attention, let's really just take this as possibly something that we might have to reckon with as true and important.

[5 : 05] Instead of that, in order that it spread no further among the people, let us warn them not to speak any more in this name. And that's the frustrating thing you find still, even today.

And why Psalm 2, the likes of Psalm 2, is so important. Because Psalm 2 began, as you well know by these words, why do the people rage against God?

Why such a thing in the experience of God's people? And as you look at Psalm 2 and the way it proceeds, why do the nations rage?

And the people's plot in vain, the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together. And then the Psalm actually answers the question that's posed there by saying, let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.

In other words, they're combining forces against the Lord, but it's against especially the way in which the Lord has specific commands and precepts and rules and, in fact, his whole entire word.

[6 : 14] And that, why is this right through history? Why do the nations rage? Why do the people plot in vain? Why is there such antagonism today to the gospel? Why is there such opposition to the church preaching the gospel?

Why is there some opposition even in parts of the wider church to the gospel truly being preached rather than what we heard already in prayer as a social message that really at the end of the day doesn't save anybody?

Well, it's because they're plotting against the Lord and against his anointed. And if you go then to the passage in Acts we're looking at, why do the Gentiles rage and the people rage in vain, plot in vain?

The rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed. And the word anointed there is literally the word Christ. That's what Christ means. To plot against the Lord and against his Christ.

And that really is why today there's such an opposition still against the gospel. And it always will be that way as long as human beings stand in opposition to God.

[7 : 21] Because this is a gospel that calls them to repent. A gospel that calls them to turn from their way and seek the Lord. A gospel that calls upon people to leave the way of sin and turn into the ways of righteousness.

And to look to the commands of God and to the promises of God and to the whole word of God. And of course that's something that we don't naturally like. And so we turn against it and find so, so many different ways in which that opposition and antagonism to the gospel is fed into our society from different streams of thought.

And it's all to do with this plot against the Lord and against his anointed. Whether it's in terms of what happens in our schools, in our education system, in our universities and colleges, any place in our society that has any semblance of truth presented to it, you will always find this reaction on the part of sadly too many people.

And of course, it says there in verse 25, why did the Gentiles rage on the people's plot in vain? Futility. And yet, it's something that people continue doing.

And that again takes up, as it's taken up from Psalm number 2, reminds us of what God does in the face of all that. He that sits in heaven shall laugh.

[8 : 47] The Lord shall have them in derision. And of course, that doesn't mean that the Lord is just treating this lightly, that he's just having a laugh at them, that he just finds the whole thing very amusing.

When it says there, the Lord laughs at all this, what it means is that he views all of these attempts as absolutely futile because his plan and his purpose is not going to be diverted.

I mentioned this on the Lord's day. His plan is not in any way affected by the opposition of the world, even of the highest authorities in any particular generation.

And his own plan, as you can see there from verse 28, it's interesting that it says there, when they prayed to the Lord, what they mentioned in prayer was that Herod and Pontius Pilate along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel lauded together and gathered to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

You see, they're finding a measure of comfort in all of this. They began the prayer as sovereign Lord. They prayed to him as the sovereign Lord in verse 24. And because they prayed to him as the one they knew as the sovereign Lord, instead of actually coming now to say Herod and Pontius Pilate together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered to do what they themselves purposed against the Lord and against your anointed, that was the case but it's actually God's plan they're carrying out.

[10 : 23] to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And sometimes that's where we've got to find our refuge.

Find our refuge there all the time. But there are many times when we can't ourselves get beyond a certain stage in our thinking and our conclusions and coming to a conclusion as to why things are as they are and how we go about dealing with it.

And so we leave it with the Lord and say Sovereign Lord it's your plan. You're carrying out your purpose. We can't understand how all of these oppositions to your gospel fit into your plan but we know it's your plan.

We would want to see them changed but they still go on unchanged. So Lord give us we pray to find ourselves taking refuge within your sovereignty. You know when I started what seems many years ago now in the ministry the ministry we hadn't back the late Murdo McCauley he was still then in active ministry not in a congregation but he was still preaching and I was speaking to him one day and he said I'm just going to say this to you he said I could say much to you by way of advice from a long time in ministry but one thing you will always find is that you have to fall back on the sovereignty of God.

You have to fall back on the sovereignty of God. You meet with things you didn't plan you wouldn't want to have planned. You meet with surprises you meet with changes you meet with challenges you meet with difficulties you meet with disappointments you meet with all sorts of things that challenged your soul and challenged your faith and sometimes even shake you up but you can always fall back on the sovereignty of God.

[12 : 17] And that's not you know when you fall back on the sovereignty of God it's not just ducking out of the issue. It's not that you're just refusing to think things through. What he meant by that was you've thought things through you've prayed over things you still believe in God you pray for his blessing but you reach the point where you've done that and still you have all of this to face.

fall back on his sovereignty and of course in our personal lives that really is so important isn't it? And that really is what happened at the cross itself.

There is the world's view of the cross come down from the cross and we will believe. Do it the way that we prefer the way we think best.

Do it in accordance with our ideology. let our ideology actually shape what the cross is, what Jesus Christ is, who he is, what he's in the world for, what salvation is, what the Bible is about.

Do it this way and we will believe. Well that's really the world of today and what the world is saying by that is well we believe in our own way anyway and we're not going to believe anything else.

[13 : 31] Now sovereign Lord he says they say sovereign Lord who made the heaven and the earth and who through the mouth of our father David said by the Holy Spirit now Lord look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.

So the orders against gospel teaching are very applicable to the situation you and I face. It doesn't matter where you look around in society you'll find people in power, people of influence, people who are very persuasive in actually getting others to join their bandwagon whatever it is and against the gospel you'll find so many joining these campaigns whether it's in education, medical issues, very many other aspects of our society's life.

people of God. But you come back to the way that it's all fitting together in God's plan and you wait upon the Lord to answer your prayers in due time.

And that's where you come to the prayers that they then prayed. And one thing that struck me during the prayers here actually was how obviously this passage had registered with too many who were praying because they both mentioned at least once if not more the whole emphasis here on boldness.

The boldness of these people we began reading at verse 13. When they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated common men they were astonished.

[15 : 18] And where we finished in verse 31 the place was shaken they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. What is it to speak the word of God with boldness?

What is this boldness that they were praying for more of? What is this boldness that you and I have the privilege of knowing for ourselves and of exercising ourselves?

Well it's not the boldness of the world. It's not the boldness of aggressiveness. It's not the boldness of speech you find in people shouting down the arguments of others. It's not boldness of self-confidence in our own ability.

It's not the boldness of human intellect. It's not the boldness of anything other than confidence in God. That's what it's meant by boldness. It's the boldness that comes through faith through trust in God.

Boldness that his word is truth. Boldness that he is always sovereign and right. Boldness that the gospel will not return to him void.

[16 : 21] It will accomplish the purposes of God. Some will be hardened under it. Some will be melted. Some will be saved. Some will be lost. But God will not be mocked and God will not be diverted from his purpose.

And you see they lifted up their voices together. They lifted up there in verse 24. When they heard it, they lifted up their voices together to God and said, Sovereign Lord.

I didn't find any of those people saying, well, we need to pray to God, but you guys are in charge of the meeting. You're the ones who are doing the prayer. We'll just follow. They all lifted up their voices together to God and said they were united in praying to God and calling upon the Lord.

They all joined in the prayers. They all joined in, whether spoken or otherwise, but they were all part of that movement of prayer. prayer. That's why we're here tonight.

We had two men engaged in prayer audibly, but you were all praying, weren't you? We're all part of praying to God.

[17 : 33] And the more the Lord actually impresses on us the need for boldness as it is in our particular day to answer the taunts and the aggression of the world, that's where we come together to pray.

one of the great things about having this meeting in the middle of the week is that we come together to pray, and being together to pray is an inestimable privilege.

You can do a lot of praying on your own, and you have to do, and I have to do a lot of praying on our own if we're really in that relationship with God that seeks as blessing as we trust we do.

But there's something particularly special, and something particularly noteworthy about being as they were here lifting up their voices together to God.

All of us gathered together and joined in mentally and spiritually with what is ascending to God by way of worship and appeal in prayer.

[18 : 33] prayer. Sometimes perhaps we are over critical of churches or congregations that are full of amens during the time that people pray.

Certainly that can be overdone, there's no doubt. But nevertheless, reasonably done, it's a good indicator, isn't it, that people are actually following what's being spoken in prayer by those who are praying publicly, and their hearts are engaged in it and their minds are engaged in it and they're actually being together, joined together in that concert of prayer, in that corporate prayer, following those who may be individually engaged in it publicly.

In any case, that's what they were doing here. They lifted up their voices together to God and said, Sovereign Lord, we pray to you.

that is where we have our comfort and our boldness from, from being together and being together and lifting up our voices to God.

I think the days in which we live certainly call for gathered prayer, for concerted prayer, for congregational prayer, for gatherings for prayer, and in facing that world in all its antagonism to the gospel.

[20 : 03] One of the great privileges and antidotes that we have to that, one of the counteractions to the actions of a hostile world, is to be concerted in prayer together and to value the time when we can be together to pray to God.

So, Sovereign Lord, they saw that as significant against the background of Psalm 2. Grant that you, your people, grant to us, Lord, to speak your word with all boldness.

Now, it might have been some people that would advise you against that. Here they were facing imprisonment, intimidation, and threat, and persecution, and yet what do they want to do?

They want to speak more with more boldness. Some might have advised them, let's just keep things quiet for a while. Let's not just be as forthright in presenting these claims of Christ.

No, that's not what they went. They went the other way altogether. Now, they said, let's grant to your servants, 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.

[21 : 24] It wasn't a time to be quiet. And isn't it interesting as well and significant that despite having been so abused and so badly treated, they didn't pray to the Lord for vengeance.

They didn't pray to the Lord that God would come and punish these people who had done such things to them. No, they prayed for healings for them. they prayed for their well-being.

They prayed that God would be merciful to them, that God would turn them into his way. And that, of course, is for our context as well, as we follow the example and the pattern that our Lord himself said.

Colossians, remember Colossians chapter 4 gives us that spirit of prayer and of not just of prayer but also of speaking to people and witnessing to people for the gospel.

Colossians chapter 4 verses 5 to 6, conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

[22 : 42] That's really just following the example of the Lord himself, 1 Peter chapter 2, which tells us that when he was reviled, he did not respond by reviling again in return, but he committed himself to him who judges righteously, to him who was the father, his father had sent him into the world.

And so here is the spirit of speech as well as of prayer, as you find it brought out for us there in the pattern that Jesus himself said.

And there's God's answer in verse 31 and what an answer it was. When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

That was God saying, I've heard you, and this is my answer. They were asking God to enable them to continue to speak with boldness. That's what he enabled them to do, but he gave a sign of it by the place that they were gathered in was actually shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

That has happened, of course, at other times in the history of the church as well, even within our own island here. I've never been in a situation where that's actually happened, but I did meet some in the course of my life thus far who were in that kind of situation, who were in a building, usually somebody's home, and where the Holy Spirit's power and presence was so evident there that people felt the place itself vibrating, trembling, God was there.

[24 : 36] God was manifesting himself there. I wonder what we say tonight, if it had happened here, what would we then say when we went out into the world?

Well, it might be something you'd find very difficult to describe, I'm sure, but the reality of that would be evident through your life and through your witness much more than if it had never happened at all, because what it says is the place they were in was filled with the Holy Spirit, where they were gathered, it was shaken, they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

It came through in their speech following this incident, as they went out with the gospel to the world, and their boldness was spirit-filled boldness.

One of the old commenters from long, long ago, John Chrysostom, who lived from 347 to 407 AD, he comments just on this particular passage here, this verse, that they were filled with the Holy Spirit, continued to speak with boldness, the shaking, he said, of this place, made them all the more unshaken, the shaking of this place, made them all the more unshaken, unshaken in their commitment to the gospel, commitment to the Lord, in their determination to speak with all boldness.

Nothing assures us as the evidence of God's presence, and God's blessing, assures us that when we go out with the gospel, whether it's in preaching ministry or in your own witness to God, the presence of God, the assurance of God, the ability to speak tactfully, and the way we saw in Colossians there, but with boldness, because your boldness comes from knowing who your God is, from knowing where your life is anchored, from knowing what the gospel is, what his promises are, and from knowing that his word will never return to him void or empty.

[26 : 58] Let's pray. We give thanks to our Lord God that you are almighty, that your power is so great that you could easily shake this place to its foundations, whether it you will to do so.

We pray, Lord, that you would grant to us, as we have thought upon this great passage, as we have thought upon your people in these times when they experience such a power and blessing from God.

O Lord, help us, we pray, to be together in prayer, even if we're not together, actually gathered as we are here tonight. Nevertheless, Lord, give us to be bound together by your spirit in common prayer.

prayer. We ask, O Lord, that the blessing that we seek from this passage for ourselves would be evident to us in days to come. Lord, grant us that boldness.

Grant us that confidence in your word. Grant us that confidence in yourself. Grant us the speech, Lord, by which we would make Christ known to the world of our day.

[28 : 07] Give us confidence against the confidence of the world. Give us the boldness of your spirit, O Lord, against the boldness of unbelief and of atheism and of antagonism to your great name.

We ask all of these things, and now as we confess our sins, seeking pardon and cleansing for Jesus' sake. Amen.