

# Trouble From Outside

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[ 0 : 00 ] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at [TrinityGraceAthens.com](http://TrinityGraceAthens.com).

You know, I've told the story before. John Calvin was in Geneva, went away for a couple of years, came back, began preaching on the very next verse. So we did move locations, but we're just marching right through the same verses of Scripture.

And we're going to look in Acts 4. So there's a lot that's going on in Acts 4, but we are going to begin reading in verse 23.

So look there with me, Acts 4, verse 23. This is talking about our friends Peter and John, we've gotten acquainted with the past couple of weeks.

Verse 23, he says, Remember, they had threatened them.

[ 1 : 16 ] And when they heard it, this is all the people, 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 earth set themselves and their rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed.

Verse 27, 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.

Verse 29, 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 to the name of your holy servant Jesus.

And 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.

[ 3 : 02 ] That is the word of God, the only inerrant authoritative word we have from the Lord. Well, theologian John Wayne once said, Courage is being scared to death and saddling up anyway.

I wonder what makes you scared to death. What makes you not want to saddle up? Now, there's probably a few equestrians in the room, but what makes you want to give up?

What makes you want to throw in the towel? What makes you want to stay in bed? What makes you want to quit? Maybe it's a mountain you see before you of credit card debt or a continually dwindling bank account as retirement is around the corner, or perhaps an impossibly hard marriage in which you have little hope for real change.

Or maybe it's just a never-ending to-do list, you know, that's already beckoning our attention this morning as we look forward to the next week. Or is it the fear that never leaves you alone?

Fear can be like a calf sprain that we feel with every movement. Fear is about mom. Fear is about money. Fear is about heart disease that runs in the family.

[ 4 : 27 ] Fear is about your failures and weaknesses and how they seem to affect everybody around you. Or fear of other people. Maybe you used to say, I don't care what other people think.

You know, I'm a bold man. I don't care. But these days, it's hard to outrun it for even a moment. Or is it just the frustration you feel after many long nights when the pain doesn't go away?

When the prayers never seem to rise above the ceiling? When the Bible only seems to be a book of words that give no comfort?

You just want to close the blinds and cry. What makes you want to give up? I know it's there. In our text this morning, Peter and John are no doubt tempted to give up.

You know, they preach the gospel. This is their second sermon, at least the second one we have recorded. They preach the gospel. They heal this lame man. Everybody's loving it. But the authorities almost immediately crack down and confront them.

[ 5 : 35 ] But instead of giving up, they respond with this remarkable courage. And honestly, the whole passage, and we don't have the time to go through every nook and cranny of this chapter, but the whole scene is just filled with fear.

So the elders and rulers and scribes are fearful. They want to take Peter and John out, but they're afraid of what the people might think. You know, Pilate was afraid of what the people might think. So too are these people there. They're afraid of how they would respond. They see the man, right? He walked into the temple. He's completely healed. They're afraid of what they would do if they cracked down even more on Peter and John.

But Peter and John fear the Lord. They're bold. They're like Jesus. Even the authorities noticed something about him. Look down at one verse in verse 13 down there.

Before we read, he said, When they saw the boldness of Peter, that's when they saw him preaching in John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. Just like people with Jesus.

[ 6 : 34 ] Is this not the carpenter's son? So too they saw these men that were probably fishermen, and they were astonished. They recognized that they had been with Jesus Christ.

What they saw is that these men were bold. When they are threatened, they don't blink. They say they will not stop preaching the gospel.

And though our lives may look very different, we need their courage. Yet wonderfully, after their release, they gather together to pray, and that's what we have in our passage. And Luke includes this prayer for us.

In many ways, it's kind of a snapshot of the way the church is supposed to and does respond to opposition, because they'll get a lot more of it.

But the Lord has it here also for us to see the secret of courage, the secret to courage, to show us how to press forward against opposition, pain, and trouble with calmness and courage.

[ 7 : 37 ] The Lord wants this prayer to be yours. This is where we're going. Be calm and courageous. The Lord will help you overcome.

Be calm and courageous. The Lord will help you overcome. I'm going to break this out in three points. No surprise there. First one is, nothing is more powerful than the Lord.

Nothing is more powerful than the Lord. And I just love this scene. When trouble strikes, when they're threatened, when they're fearful, the apostles run to their friends. Did you see that in verse 23?

23, when they were released, they went to their friends, and they went to the Lord. They didn't run away. They didn't bury their troubles under another dessert, another beer, another show.

They carried their troubles to the Lord, the only one that can help. It's not easy. It's not always easy to talk to the Lord, but that's what they go and do.

[ 8 : 40 ] And look what they say. They confess, firstly, that the Lord is more powerful than anyone or anyone else. Anything else. The Lord is more powerful than anyone or anything else.

That's what it means when they say sovereign Lord. They address him sovereign Lord. The word literally translated there is despot. It means a ruler or a master. It refers to someone who has complete authority.

It's a word that's used throughout the New Testament for owners and masters of an estate or masters over slaves and workers. Except here, there's no hint of evil.

The Lord is a thoroughly good master. Look what he's made, which we can actually see in our new facility. We can see what he's made, the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them.

You know, Peter's telling us this to underline his unmatched power. I mean, look at the stars. I don't know what Apple did this week, but they didn't do anything like the stars.

[ 9 : 40 ] Look at the mountains. Look at that range that we see on Decatur Pike of Star Mountain. It's the Lord. And Peter's saying, and he has unmatched power. But more than that, he's saying he has continued power over everything he's made.

He's alive. When we see the heavens, we're not supposed to look back and say, oh man, wasn't that great what God did? But look at what kind of God upholds all this by his power and according to his purpose.

You know, just as we care for that first car we bought. I mean, I'm sure we can all recount the first car we bought. And if you haven't bought it yet, you will soon. And we're like washing and waxing and vacuuming that car.

And then you get 10 years down the road and it just looks like a bomb went off inside it. But so too, the Lord watches over the creation he's made.

Our God did not spin this into place and take a nap. He's alive. Daniel 4 says it like this.

[10:43] He does according to his will among the host of heavens and among the inhabitants of the earth and none can stay his hand or say to him, what have you done?

The Lord's in the heavens. He does what he pleases. No one controls him, corners him, or boxes him in. No one counsels him, advises him, or helps him. Psalm 55 hits it so well.

If I were hungry, I wouldn't call you. If I were thirsty, I wouldn't ask you for a drink of water. The cattle on a thousand hills is mine. It's all mine. The earth and the fullness thereof is mine.

And he says, nothing is more powerful than the Lord. But they confess it. They take this confession even more seriously. They say, the Lord is more powerful than all our trouble.

The Lord's not just powerful out there in theory. He's powerful in the details of our lives. That's where they go to. Look at verse, where they quote Psalm 2 down here in verse 25.

[11:42] They say, while the Gentiles rage and the people's plot in vain, the kings of earth set themselves and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed. The idea is that the ruler, the kings and rulers are gathering together against the Lord's anointed.

They're gathering together against Jesus Christ. The opposition against him is not general. The ruler is specific. It's right here in the details of their life.

Look at verse 27. So he quotes Psalm 2, which is a hugely important psalm. He says, truly in this city. So we know by Psalm 2 that the people are gonna gather and gather against the Lord's anointed.

Well, now we know. We don't just know in theory. We know in practice. In this very city, there are gathered together against your holy servant, Jesus, Pontius Herod and Pontius Pilate, Gentiles, and against the people of Israel.

But, because of who he is, look at verse 28 says, they will do whatever your hand and your plan has predestined to take place.

[12:56] I mean, that just almost comes right out of Isaiah 46. I am the Lord. There is no other. I am God. There is none besides me declaring the end from the beginning from ancient times things not yet done, saying my counsel shall stand.

I will accomplish all my purpose, calling a bird of prey from the east, man of my counsel from the far country. I have spoken. I will bring it to pass. I have purpose. I will do it.

And this is what comforts him. You know, what comforts these men is not these men are wicked. and the Lord is sorry about it. That's not comforting to these men. What comforts them is that these men are wicked, but the Lord is more powerful.

They will only do what he plans and permits. This doesn't solve all of their problems, but it does give them rest. It quiets them.

Are you frenzied? Are you frenzied? These verses are precious. Are you frenzied? You know, often we, we, you know, we put that verse, be still and know that the Lord is God.

[14:05] You know, we kind of put that on a coffee cup, you know, so we drink in the morning when it's nice and quiet and, or we hang it. Sorry, I shouldn't sound, that's kind of mocking. I don't want to have that, that voice, but you know, or we hang it over the mantel or something like that, but have you ever read the context of that verse?

It's talking about the Lord marching through the earth, ruling and reigning. That's why Luther said our God is a very present help in our time of need, not because he's quiet, but because he's loud and no one will bring him under.

He's strong and powerful, so we are still. He may throw things at me, but the Lord is more.

He calms them. You know, one writer that I read this week said the tone of this prayer is very calm. I wonder if the tone of our prayers in these moments is very calm.

It gives them rest. What's going on here? I think Paul Tripp says it very well. They're fearing one who's more powerful than all their trouble. Let's look at that quote.

[15:18] He says, the only truly practical and lasting solution to the fear of situations, locations, or people is fear of God.

Only fear of someone more powerful than what you are facing and the assurance that this one of scary power has chosen to unleash his power for your benefit has the power to give you courage in the face of something or someone more powerful than you.

That is what's going on. They're captured by the fear of God. A small God of happenstance and coincidence will not sustain you when you lose your job. A wimpy God with his hands tied will not steal your soul when cancer comes out of remission.

You need, we need, I need the scary, powerful, good God of the Bible. Our greatest trouble often is not the trouble that troubles us but the way we carry our trouble on our own and don't take it to the Lord in fear.

I want to fear the Lord like them. That's what's going on. They realize, bring all you got. I fear the Lord. Point two, you belong to him.

[16:39] Point two, you belong to him. After that introduction or that address, the disciples make specific requests in prayer but notice what they don't pray for.

They don't pray for the opposition to stop. They don't pray for God to take the evil men out which would have been a completely just prayer. They don't pray for another assignment.

Sometimes we're like that. Lord, Lord, just move me somewhere else, right? I'm all in for you just not all in right here. Often our prayers boil down to little more than that and prayers like that assume we know better but notice what they do pray for.

Look in verse 29. Let's read that together. He says, and now Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness.

Look at them. That's the first thing they say. Look at their threats. I just love that as if the Lord didn't see. You know, like, hey Lord, let me draw your attention but maybe that's what we should do in prayer but then they pray give us boldness.

[17:48] Essentially what they're saying is if it's true that you're more powerful than all our trouble and if it's true that all our trouble is guided by your hand and if it's true that you're our Lord and Savior then I am your servant give me boldness.

That's the emphasis. You're the sovereign Lord. Jesus was your servant. David was your servant and so too am I your servant. You call the shots. I will follow you.

You command. I will obey. Only give me what I need. One thing they needed was courage.

Isn't that amazing? I just love this prayer for a thousand reasons that I want to enumerate right now but it's amazing. Give me boldness.

Lord, I'll get out of bed tomorrow. You're going to have to help me. We're in this together. This is not giving up or giving in.

[18:48] This is not quitting. This is not kind of resigning ourselves. Sometimes we're just like, well, I'm just going to do low expectations from here on out. That's not what's going on. This is not drudgery. This is not grinning and bear it.

This is not walking on eggshells before a God they're afraid to upset. This is freedom. This is freedom. This is freedom of someone who's been giving back their life and are ready to give the Lord everything else.

In 1849, a young see if I can pronounce this right Fyodor Dostoevsky barely missed the firing squads. He was he is a lot of people would say he's a or at least the brothers Karamazov is the greatest work written in western literature and it is a doozy.

I made it through half but if you set it down for like a day you get lost again because there are just so many characters and it's so well written but I tried alright can I get some kudos for that but he was imprisoned in Russia actually for reading banned literature with a group of other revolutionaries and sentenced to death the men marched him out into the square if you know the history of Russia that's not a place you want to be and they prepared Dostoevsky and these men for death the firing squad gathers there's going to be a mass execution the drums began to play I guess the funeral dirge or something like that death was seconds away and at that very moment a messenger arrived on horseback and said the execution has been canceled by the czar by the king it's over now they didn't release him out of prison they just removed the execution sentence and one man broke down crying another went mad

I mean can you imagine preparing yourself for death being on death row and then it's gone Dostoevsky was overcome with joy listen to these words he said he went back to his cell and he remembers I cannot recall when I was ever as happy as on that day I walked up and down the cell up and down the cell and sang the whole time I sang at the top of my voice so happy at being given

back my life he immediately writes his brother and says only now do I know how much I love you you can imagine him in that scenario well that's the same thing that's happened to these apostles they were given their life back they were on a dead end course and the Lord rescued them they were saved look down at verse 11 what they realized is that this Jesus the one that was rejected has become the cornerstone and salvation is in no one else not in heaven or on earth or under the earth it's only in Jesus Christ and they were set free by this they were never the same and so it's only right that they say

[ 21 : 48 ] I am your servant if you set me free then I'm yours I'll walk through anything send me where you want me use me where you need me this is holy ground to be over here their prayer you know it reminds me of Psalm 116 when the psalmist says oh Lord I am your servant I am your servant son of your maidservants you have loosed my bonds it's a great prayer just pray to the Lord just a little side note there's room for you to take it up to say to the Lord I don't know what's going on this is a wonderful prayer I'm your servant Lord it's the freedom of new life it's the freedom of not living for you it's the freedom of letting go of control you were never in control just so you know it's the freedom of not living to protect yourself as I get older the sin of self protection and what I mean by that is kind of always managing what people think about me in every moment can be such a serious sin sometimes it leads me to talk too much sometimes it leads me to shut my mouth completely

I'm thinking about my outfit well not really my outfit but sometimes thinking about any number of things what people think of my house what people think of my family are my kids too loud in the restaurant whatever it is it frees you salvation frees you it's the freedom of not loving your life sometimes we post that on Instagram I love my life most often is when you're kicked up on the beach or something like that you're not doing it when the kids have thrown food across the kitchen right I love my life three loads of laundry today I love my life because there's something more than life that's what they discovered and that's what we must discover Revelation 12 says that those who overcome the enemy are those who love not their lives even unto death the apostles were just like that I mean we know we studied Philippians 1 where Paul says for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain I mean if he doesn't love his life that much he's completely free I mean what do you do with the man who says that kill him that's gain let him live that's Christ I mean what is going on they're free that's that's what we want to see when he says I am your servant he's saying I'm completely free nothing in this world can bother me you know Jonathan Edwards was the greatest theologian that ever lived on the American soil but he was fired but you don't know that story he led the second great awakening or was a major player he preached sinners in the hands of an angry God which does get bad press but is an incredible sermon and in his final week before he preached his final sermon which is an incredible sermon of graciousness if you want to go look it up one person so one person in the congregation said as they watched him that week this is the people that fired him they fired Jonathan Edwards I mean that's those people I'm gonna talk to when I get to heaven let's straighten this out they said of Edwards that week a quote his joy was out of the reach of his enemies you may fire me my joy will be out of your reach he actually wrote this he look with me when he was writing on first Corinthians 13 he says love for God that means our love for God sets men above the injuries of others above anything they can do to us sticks and stones the more men love

God the more they will place all their happiness in God they will look on him as their all and this happiness and portion is what men cannot touch that's incredible that's someone who does not love their life are we like that you know is our happiness in a place that others cannot touch is there is there is our happiness in a place where pain and trouble cannot get a hold well if it's not then we need to return back to that hill called Calvary to take a fresh glimpse at all that our sin demanded before a holy and righteous God the scriptures say that he hung there not for our his sins but for our sins he hung there naked and alone that he might be crushed in our place and we might have a sure and certain source of joy throughout anything that's why I love the hymn writer it says I sing because I'm happy

I sing because I'm free his eye is on the sparrow and I know he watches me but will it be enough to say Lord you're in control you rule and reign you're wonderful you're good you're kind I'm your servant I humble myself before you I'm free in that you know I'm laying all the cares you know that's why it says don't be anxious about anything but in everything about prayer and supplication make your quest known to God you push them off your plate but will it be enough will trusting the Lord

and humbling ourselves before him be enough to overcome thankfully we're going to keep going  
verse three assures us or point three the spirit will supply all the strength you need the spirit will  
supply all the strength you need after they pray the Lord answers that's the way it works give ear oh  
[ 28 : 11 ] Lord to my request in the moment my distress I call upon you for you answer me every  
time and look what happens when when they pray verse 31 the place in which they were gathered  
together was shaken they were all filled with the Holy Spirit remember he's not that weird uncle he's  
a person of the Trinity and they continue to speak the word of God with boldness they the place  
shakes you know it's an earthquake it's the Lord that's what happens and he shows up that way in  
Sinai and he shows up here they're all filled afresh with the spirit so we we saw that you know in  
Acts 2 right and then now we're seeing here because they're not meant to live by their own strength  
meant to live by the the spirit and then they continue to speak the word with boldness so they pray  
for boldness the Lord answers and gives them boldness now what's going on here I think the Lord  
is saying I'll protect you I'll give you all that you need in fact the scriptures say that again and again  
the Lord the scriptures say they tell us to exalt in the Lord they that's what the vast majority of  
scriptures do they exalt who the

Lord is he's merciful and gracious he he's abounding in steadfast love and and faithfulness he's  
he's everlasting from everlasting to everlasting your God he's good and wide and powerful they're  
all his attributes they're the incommunicable attributes of God they're who he is in his character and  
then they say to us just trust him lean not on your own understanding depend on him wait for him  
God works for those who wait for him don't work rest how do we do this how does this work and I  
think this verse and I think our friend John Flavre are going to help us figure that out now this quote  
is a bit of a doozy I have to be honest this we may need another cup of coffee to get through this  
but if you can put up that Flavre quote but it is incredible it made some light bulbs go off so  
hopefully we'll see what happens he says though they be God's property so he's talking about  
attributes he's talking about God's goodness and loving kindness faithfulness everlasting all these  
things though they be God's properties yet they are his people's privileges and benefits so it's good  
for us that God's faithful wise sovereign all these things for when God makes over himself to them  
in covenant to be their God he delivers to them the keys of all his attributes for their benefit and  
security now he gets real specific here what he's saying is is all these things are who God is and his  
goodness and his power and his his trustworthiness and he gives his people the keys so those  
things are true for them let's continue after that colon of this very long sentence he says and is as if  
he should say my wisdom is yours to contrive for your good to work for your good my power is  
yours to protect your person to protect your life my mercy yours to forgive your sins my  
all-sufficiency is yours to supply your want all that I am all that I have is for your benefit and comfort  
I think that's the idea and I know that's a doozy you may have to read over that later but at the most  
repeated promise in the Bible is I will be with you and what the Lord means by that is not just  
I'll walk beside you I'll carry you as you only see one set of footsteps or something like that he's  
saying I'll help you I'll give myself to you I'll give all you need from my great power hide in me and I  
will fight for you all of me is for you do you need power you need a place to lay down your fears the  
Lord of worlds is on your side that's what he's saying the one who knows every hair on your head  
and supplies strength to the weary is waiting for you do you need wisdom are you perplexed by  
life's twists and turns the Lord is the only wise God promises to counsel you with his eye upon you  
that means he never loses sight of you do you need tender mercies have the years been harsh  
have you been hurt he who did not spare his own son will not hurt a broken blade of grass he's  
tender and kind he's on your side you need help call to him whose heart is ready and willing call to  
him whose power is infinite and store houses are limitless John Flav on another place says  
difficulties are for men not for God that's what it means and yet in these verses it gets even better  
the Lord doesn't make a promise to us he sends his spirit he who has given you his spirit has given  
you his spirit to tell you that he will never fail he who's given you his spirit has given you his spirit to  
promise that the gospel go to the end of the earth and he was spending his spirit to carry you there I  
recently read about a guy who bought a house with a strand of bamboo my kids love bamboo but I  
hate that stuff near the driveway he decided he's going to get rid of the bamboo so he decided to  
cut it down I've done this to Holly Bush before he took an axe to its roots you know he's just  
smashing them all the pieces with all he's got you know he's got his maul out and he's hammering  
those things he dug down and removed as many of the roots as possible I can't imagine the amount  
of time he put but only anger would drive you that far because you hate bamboo but then he poured

poison over everything that was left that stump remover probably some poison off the internet then he filled the the the hole with gravel several feet of gravel and then just to be very sure he paved over it with cement right two years later he noticed something coming up a little green stick of bamboo pushing through the cement I don't know if it's gonna work but armed with God's strength the people of God are like that bulldoze me over I'll get up yell at me I'll get up oppose me I'll get up threaten me I'll get up trouble me with all sorts of things that's what the devil likes to do he likes to steal kill and destroy our enemy is real but I'll get up because the Lord is on my side be calm and courageous the Lord will help us overcome sometimes in conclusion we may not feel his power immediately or see the answer

immediately I want to say a couple one is I just say rest assured it will come he who spared his own son when that lets you lie and want but in the meantime don't quit don't stop praying don't stop walking don't stop sowing often the Christian life is likened to sowing because we're just casting seed out and sometimes it's all you can do to throw seed into the row because it's all you know how to do Piper helps us in these moments we're so ready to give up and just holding on trying to slowly walk and be faithful he says when there's simple straightforward jobs to be done and you're full of sadness and tears are flowing easily go ahead and do the job with tears be realistic say to your tears tears I feel you you make me want to quit life but there's a field to be sown dishes to be washed car to be fixed sermon to be written I know you will wet my face several times today some of you might be right there but I have work to do and you will just have to go with me I intend to take my bag of seeds and so if you come along then you'll just have to wet the rose he continues then say on the basis of God's word tears I know that you won't stay forever all suffering has a shelf life and an expiration date he says the very fact that I just do my work tears and all will in the end bring a harvest of blessing so go ahead and flow if you must but I believe I don't yet see it or feel it fully I believe that the simple work of sowing will bring sheaths of harvest and your tears will be turned to joy be calm press forward the Lord is with you he'll help you father in heaven we cast ourselves onto you we love you we thank you we worship you you have given us life and in your presence is fullness of joy pleasures forevermore and we pray that you would help us to walk calmly lord in this world that's so frenzied and distracted and driven about by so many things we want to walk with the calmness that only can rest on those who fear the Lord Lord we don't fear who kings we don't fear the wealthy we don't fear the influential we want to fear you alone you have sought us and found us and so we rest holy and completely in you thank you in Jesus name amen you've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens Tennessee for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at [trinitygraceathens.com](http://trinitygraceathens.com) you you