

Acts 4:31

31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the Word of God with boldness.

Someone once said that the role of a Bible teacher is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comforted.

This morning our topic is prayer. By a show of hands...when it comes to the subject of prayer, how many of you need to be comforted?

How many of you need to be afflicted?

Donald Barnhouse was the pastor of 10th Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. One Sunday morning he stunned his congregation by saying, "Prayer changes nothing!" You could have heard a pin drop in that packed worship service.

Now Barnhouse was not a heretic.

So, what do you think he meant by this statement?

As Christians, we believe in what we call the sovereignty of God. That is that we believe that God has an absolute right to do all things according to his own good pleasure and that He doesn't answer to us.

We also believe that God is omniscient. That is that He knows everything that has happened and that is going to happen.

So if God is all knowing, all powerful, and sovereign, then why should we pray?

Our study this morning is the continuation of the events that followed the healing of the man who was born lame and found by Peter and

John at the gate in front of the Temple begging. Let's recap the story. Look back at Acts 3:1-9.

1 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. 2 And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. 4 But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, "Look at us!" 5 And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. 6 But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene — walk!" 7 And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. 8 With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

After the lame man was healed, Peter took the opportunity to preach his second recorded sermon and he was promptly arrested and thrown into jail for the evening by the religious leaders in the Temple.

Why were Peter and John put in jail?

The next morning, a court is convened and Peter and John are asked to account for their actions. Look at chapter 4 beginning in verse 7.

7 ... "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, " Rulers and elders of the people, 9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead — by this name this man stands here before you in good health. 11 " He is the **STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED** by you, **THE BUILDERS**, but **WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER** stone. 12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

So Peter takes the opportunity to preach to his judges through the power of the Holy Spirit. When he finishes, the judges conclude that there is nothing they can do because the people all were witnesses to the miracle that had taken place. Notice what happens in Acts 4:21.

21 When they had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them) on account of the people, because they were all glorifying God for what had happened; 22 for the man was more than forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

Verse 21 says that Peter and John were threatened. What type of threat do you think the court might have used?

It is easy for us to think that Peter and John were super human spiritual giants who were impervious to feelings of fear or anxiety. But the truth is they were just like you and me. Notice what happened following their release. Look at verse 23.

23 When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

Peter and John went to their own companions. Other translations say they went to their own kind. What can you read into those words?

At the end of a particularly difficult situation, there is nothing I would rather do, than to come home and fall into the loving arms of my wife who I know isn't going to do anything other than be loving and supportive. Am I the only one?

God gave us loved ones and friends to recharge ourselves after some tough times. That is what Peter and John needed. They were not despairing; however, they were in need of encouragement. Their own listened to them, cared deeply, and showed sensitivity to their needs.

Notice what happened in verse 24.

24 And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 25 who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, Why did the gentiles rage and the peoples devise futile things? 26 The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Christ. 27 For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur. 29 And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, 30 while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.

What happened?

Notice the prayer was spontaneous. It just happened.

The first words out of their mouths were "O Sovereign Lord" or literally "o absolute master". In a situation that was humanly intimidating, when they were tempted to react in fear and panic, they took those thoughts and feelings captive and prayerfully reaffirmed that God was bigger than their enemies, that He had everything under control.

Notice the specific ways they remembered this:

V 24: God has created the whole world, so he is bigger than any human power.

Vs 25-26 quotes Psalm 2 and says specifically that God is sovereign over the resistance of human rulers. He "laughs" at their plans to reject his sovereignty.

V 27: God displayed his sovereignty over human rulers through the execution of Jesus. God is so powerful that he can accomplish his purpose even through their wrong and rebellious choices! Nothing demonstrates this more than Jesus' crucifixion. God used man's greatest rejection of his authority to accomplish his greatest act of redemption!

And so they prayed.

To pray in the name of Jesus means praying to the same God Jesus prayed to.

Now what would you have prayed for in this situation?

I would have prayed for safety, vengeance, etc.

But notice what they prayed for. They ask God to take note of the Sanhedrin's threats, but their main request is for the power to go on sharing the gospel with confidence (look at vs 29-30).

29 And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, 30 while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.

And God answered their request. Look at verse 31.

31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

To pray in Jesus' name means asking for the resources to do God's will, rather than asking God to do your will.

Notice again that Luke points out that these believers were again filled with the Holy Spirit. I will continue to point that out through our study as I believe that it demonstrates to us our need to continually seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit as well.

God answered their pray. The verse says that they began to speak the word of God with boldness.

This was exactly what they had asked for.

Many things have changed in our country this past week. After two decades of a conservatively controlled congress the party that is usually thought of as being more liberal has gained control. As Christians we sometimes complain that it was the liberal congress that took prayer out of our schools.

But I think it is interesting that at the same time that prayer was taken out of our schools, most evangelical churches have eliminated prayer meetings from their weekly offerings.

Why did that happen?

Of course what Barnhouse went on to quote after he said that “Prayer changes nothing” was 2 Chron 7:14 which says, “if my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

Prayer changes nothing unless God’s people will humble themselves and pray. So let’s do that this morning.

I would like for us to do a table exercise this morning.

Table Exercise

At your tables share with your group situations of those who are persecuting you. It might be in the work place or even within your own families or neighbors. Use the time to have others at your table pray that God would take note of the situation, but more importantly pray for the power to go on sharing the gospel with confidence to those who the Holy Spirit would open the door for you to share Christ with.

The table leader can dismiss the group when the class is over.