

July 19 “With Great Boldness” (Empowerment)

Introduction: 4:1-22

Persecution threat = ramping up. It’s incomprehensible to throw people into prison because a lame man had been healed (maybe if they’d kicked him/beaten him – but not for this!) The **antagonists** (Sadducees, scribes, etc.) were very different from one another, but they came to common agreement about this new danger. The Persecution (outward behavior) was simply an extension of **Unbelief** (inward attitude). Not every unbeliever is a persecutor; but not every Christian is a hypocrite. They were as spiritually blind as the man was physically lame. They rejected the Gospel ultimately because of **power & control** issues. Note 7b: “*By what power or what name did you do this?*” Probably the central question in life is: “Who will be in charge of my life? 2 options: Me...or God?” They felt threatened by a loss of power & control. Their power structure was in upheaval/threatened. Ironically, this has been witnessed in church history, too. There can be a corrosive effect when religious power is gained. Instead of serving God, it can be manipulated to serve selfish purposes. These Jewish leaders, who had been persecuted so often (and would be again and again), used their power to persecute followers of Jesus. But this is not a Jewish problem. Later in history, the persecutors were Christians. Some of the darkest moments in the history of the Church was when the Church had “silver and gold” (Acts 3:6). **Roman Catholics**, who had been the subject of persecution, used their state power to persecute Protestants (the Inquisition). When the Protestants emerged triumphant over the Catholics in England, the **Anglican Church** used the power of the state to persecute the Puritans. Lord Acton stated: “Power corrupts! Absolute power corrupts absolutely!” (Another reason to advocate for the separation of “Church and State.”)

13b The religious leaders saw the courage of Peter and John and “*they took note that these men had been with Jesus.*” The disciples were ordinary & unschooled men. What made them unique & different? They’d been with Jesus.

17-21a The response of the religious leaders was to try to bully, intimidate, and threaten. When humans feel **threatened**, they either run away, or they fight back. Since these leaders had a power base, they knew they could threaten the disciples. They warned them not to do this again and to quit speaking about Jesus. So the duo returned and there was a wonderful celebration among the followers of Jesus.

Acts 4:23-31 *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. 24 When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. 25 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? 26 The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.' 27 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. 28 They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. 29 Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. 30 Stretch out*

*your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." 31 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**.*

V 24 The very first thing they did was that they **prayed**. This shows where there affections were – they loved God. They were committed and surrendered to doing God’s will, even if it meant they were going to be imprisoned and threatened with worse. The agenda had obviously moved beyond their own fear of “what might happen to us?” (as was Peter’s concern when he denied Jesus three times) to “Lord, what would You have us do?” They had **unity** in their prayer. They were all on the same page. There was great celebration here.

Notice they had each other. Peter was not alone. John was with him. They not only had each other, but they had a **community**. I’m sure they prayed individually, but the focus in Acts = they prayed **together**.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS: *Do we have people in our lives that we can celebrate and rejoice with when things go well? How do WE meet threats and problems? Do we have people we can pray with? Do we have places of true, deep community? Specifically, who are those people in my life I can rejoice with and can share my concerns with? Who are the people that I am providing this sense of care for, too? Asbury’s goal is to link people in these communities. We will always have things we can celebrate and we will always have threats upon our lives and security. We are not built to handle it alone. As Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 says: *Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.**

Note the content of their **Prayer**

A.) **GOOD NEWS.** We should never begin with the human condition. We should never begin with “Bad” news. Genesis 1-2 (creation) precedes Genesis 3 (the fall). God is Sovereign. God is Creator. God, the Holy Spirit inspired human beings (David...this is the witness of scripture).

B.) **BAD NEWS.** A term is used here which I found interesting: “The Kings of the Earth.” Since our music ministry has done “Saviour” (and will, under slight pressure from me ☺) will be performing it again for us on December 13th, I noted the strong tenor voices singing that phrase: “*The Kings of the Earth, and the kingdoms built by man – rise up in their glory – then go back to dust again.*” This term, “*the kings of the earth*” is used 22x in the Bible. It is found most frequently in Revelation (8x). In Chapter 1 (the “Alpha”) & in Chapter 21 (the “Omega”) it tells us that Jesus is the ruler of “The Kings of the Earth.” That sets things in proper perspective. But all in-between the “Good News” of first and last, the “Kings of the Earth” run amuck. They are horribly evil & monstrously destructive. They oppose the works of God. They are proud, haughty,

materialistic, and evil. They commit adulteries and abominations. It's the classic "Good News – Bad News – Good News" analogy even in this prayer.

C.) **GOOD NEWS** = **God is still in control! All-Powerful** (vs. 28) The Kings of the Earth are finally set in their place. They do not prevail. God wins. That's why the Disciples aren't going to back down. They are empowered by the Holy Spirit. They know "*the rest of the story.*"

They have a Twofold Prayer request:

1.) **BOLDNESS** Empower/enable us to speak your word. God is sovereign, but we still have our **free will** (vs. 29). Help us to use our free will in ways which will build up the Kingdom of God

2.) **MIRACULOUS SIGNS/WONDERS**

Note what happens:

1.) The place was shaken

2.) They were filled w. the Holy Spirit (which is a continuous command throughout the remainder of the New Testament. There's one baptism, but there are many fillings of the Holy Spirit.)

3.) They spoke God's word boldly (vs. 31). This is far more than just a personal fulfillment plan. Their prayers were not self-absorbed ("Lord, give me a really good parking spot!"). If not filled with the Holy Spirit, we will be filled with flesh (see Galatians 5 – "Fruit of the Holy Spirit"). If not filled with the Holy Spirit, our boldness will come off as being rude, annoying, or like we are jerks. We become bold, not to be filled with hot air, but filled with the breath of the Spirit to act in ways congruent with God. We become missional – we are not like a balloon filled with hot air & then released to fly without direction. We have a direction: Glorify God/Make Disciples. This is what life is about!

Application

Who am I? Why am I here? How am I living out my life? Am I under the dominion of the Holy Spirit? Is my life filled with prayer? Am I linked in Christian community? Am I being empowered to be a witness for Christ?

These are questions centering on our **Identity** and **Purpose**. The message of the Christian faith is that we belong to God and we are here to serve God; and do it, not in isolation, but within the context of Christian community. God gives us the opportunity to pray, to fellowship with other Christians, so that ultimately we will be witnesses for Him. We are not perfect, but we do have a strategic mission. God wants to use ALL of us in this way.

We are to be people of:

1) **Love & compassion** – not hatred & judgment

2) **Xn Community**: Peter AND John

3) **Truth** based – this wasn't Greek mythology, nor Roman government; not superficial but has real content & was based on God's wisdom, not man's.

4) **Prayer** – this is not merely a human activity!

- 5) **Integrity** – talk the talk AND walk the walk
- 6) Filled with the **Holy Spirit** - not the flesh