

I.N.I.

Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 3, 2020
Acts 4:23-33

In Christ Jesus, who by His resurrection is LORD of heaven and earth, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

With mouths open and eyes wide, the Sanhedrin was shocked. Let's listen again to Peter's bold words: **LET IT BE KNOWN TO YOU ALL, AND TO ALL THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, THAT BY THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OF NAZARETH, WHOM YOU CRUCIFIED, WHOM GOD RAISED FROM THE DEAD, BY HIM THIS MAN STANDS HERE BEFORE YOU WHOLE. THIS IS THE 'STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED BY YOU BUILDERS, WHICH HAS BECOME THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE.'** NOR IS THERE SALVATION IN ANY OTHER, FOR THERE IS **NO OTHER NAME UNDER HEAVEN GIVEN AMONG MEN BY WHICH WE MUST BE SAVED.**

Imagine the surprise of these Jewish leaders. They were not used to being spoken to like this and especially not by someone like Peter, an ignorant, unlearned fisherman, a follower of that lowly trouble maker Rabbi Jesus? Wasn't he one of those men who fled when Jesus was arrested and was nowhere to be found when Jesus was convicted and crucified? Isn't he and these men ones who have been inconspicuous during these past couple months?

In our Scripture reading we heard these words: **NOW WHEN THEY SAW THE BOLDNESS OF PETER AND JOHN, AND PERCEIVED THAT THEY WERE UNEDUCATED AND UNTRAINED MEN, THEY MARVELED.** They were astonished, they were amazed!

But the next line is so, so very important---**AND THEY REALIZED THAT THEY HAD BEEN WITH JESUS!**

From where did this boldness and courage come? How could these simple, untrained, uneducated men speak so eloquently and boldly before such a highly respected group as the Jewish senate? The answer: **THEY HAD BEEN WITH JESUS!**

Jesus and the power of His resurrection lived in their hearts and it showed in their lives.

Such a confident power lived in them that even after being severely threatened and then threatened again, they could answer: **"WHETHER IT IS RIGHT IN THE SIGHT OF GOD TO LISTEN TO YOU MORE THAN TO GOD, YOU JUDGE. FOR WE CANNOT BUT SPEAK THE THINGS WHICH WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD."**

No doubt the severe threats entailed graphic descriptions of the torture and torment done to their fallen leader Jesus. No doubt the Jewish council warned Peter and John that the same thing would happen to them, maybe even worse if they kept preaching and teaching about this Man. These were real threats, not just scare tactics and empty words! But Peter and John were unfazed.

Our text begins with Peter and John returning to the rest of the disciples and believers and reporting all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.

How did they respond? Panic, fear, keeping silent, fleeing. Saying things like—"Jesus will understand why we just cannot do as He commanded us and keep on preaching and teaching. He wouldn't want us to suffer and die for being a Christian would he?"

None of this was said or done! Instead they prayed to their Lord God. And this prayer suggests the theme for this morning's sermon:

LEARN TO PRAY IN TROUBLED TIMES!

These were indeed troubled times! Two of their group had been imprisoned. They were threatened severely by the same people who had brought about their Lord's crucifixion.

And for what did they pray? The destruction of their enemies? Their freedom and safety? No, they prayed for more confidence and boldness to do their Savior's will!

We have separated our text into two parts: **LEARN TO PRAY IN TROUBLED TIMES---**

**I: With Confidence in an Almighty God who accomplishes His Will
by being Faithful to His Word.**

LEARN TO PRAY IN TROUBLED TIMES---

II: With Boldness in a Lord whose Will is still being Done in our Lives.

What do we do when we are in trouble, or when we are surrounded by problems, disasters, disappointments, dangers, even death? Do we first hunker down and think that it is up to us to find a way out; up to us to handle the situation and solve the problem? Notice in our text we are told **SO WHEN THEY HEARD THAT, THEY RAISED THEIR VOICE TO GOD WITH ONE ACCORD...all together.** They were moved in the same direction, spontaneously, each of them reacted in the same way---**TAKE IT TO THE LORD IN PRAYER.**

In the first part of their prayer the believers address God as **LORD.** Literally the word means "Despot." It signifies an absolute ruler, one with complete control, authority and power. They state: **LORD, YOU ARE GOD, WHO MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM...** Everything is under God's control. He made it all and He controls it all. A prayer to this kind of LORD expresses the confidence that if He wants to help them, no one and nothing will be able to stop Him. They placed their confidence in the omnipotence (all-powerfulness) of their God.

But we also see in these early Christians an impressive knowledge of the Scriptures and the ability to both interpret them and apply them to their lives. They turned to Psalm 2.

Prayer is not enough! That is only our speaking to God. It is in the Bible that God speaks to us and gives us the comfort, strength and courage we need in every situation. When troubles and trials arise it is the Bible to which we too must turn for solid comfort and real strength.

These believers saw in Psalm 2 that David, some 1,000 years earlier, already predicted this widespread opposition against God and His Anointed One, the Christ. Nations, rulers, leaders would plot against Him. What they were experiencing should not take them by surprise, or scare them. God already foretold it. It would be typical of their time as well as to the years to come.

But notice the important words of King David. They **RAGE AND PLOT VAIN THINGS.** Their schemes, desires and plans will be useless, in vain. For God would accomplish His will even through their actions.

Had God lost control when Jesus was arrested, tried, convicted, beaten and then crucified? No, in all of this He had exercised His power. It was what He planned to happen. As the believers said in their prayer, these enemies were doing... **WHATEVER YOUR HAND AND YOUR PURPOSE DETERMINED BEFORE TO BE DONE.**

Peter had said the same thing on Pentecost when He declared that the people with lawless hands took Jesus to crucify Him who was **BEING DELIVERED BY THE DETERMINED PURPOSE AND FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD.** God did not will their sin to be done, but in His omniscience and power He made men's sins and evil designs to accomplish His purposes, to fulfill His will of sacrificing His Son for all sinners.

What a marvelous prayer of confidence. What was God's purpose in Herod's, Pilate's and the Sanhedrin's hatred, animosity and judgment against Jesus? Our **SALVATION!** Our **REDEMPTION!** Had that not happened, we would all still be lost in our sins, condemned before a just God with all of the guilt and punishment on our souls.

What a tremendous lesson in our lives to learn, especially in these uncertain and troubled times! God always accomplishes His will by being faithful to His Word!

And what was God's will in connection with the Sanhedrin's threats? The believers pray: **"NOW, LORD, LOOK ON THEIR THREATS, AND GRANT TO YOUR SERVANTS THAT WITH ALL BOLDNESS THEY MAY SPEAK YOUR WORD, BY STRETCHING OUT YOUR HAND TO HEAL, AND THAT SIGNS AND WONDERS MAY BE DONE THROUGH THE NAME OF YOUR HOLY SERVANT JESUS."**

They were the Lord's slaves. His will was clear to them. His will was that they should speak His Word to declare His name and the forgiveness of sins in His name throughout the world. Jesus repeated that to them throughout His 40 days after His resurrection, prior to His Ascension into heaven.

These believers knew that they too would be treated as Peter and John were and that they would be tempted to cave in, to remain silent, to be ashamed of Jesus. In this prayer they are asking the

Lord to overcome their fears and the promptings of their sinful flesh and instead be led to speak out boldly.

In other words they are praying that the Lord's will be done not so much to them, but through them. That He continue to use their lives, their testimonies, their witnessing to accomplish His will of spreading the message of a crucified and risen Savior for all. And to accomplish this by accompanying signs and wonders, by miracles in the name of this same Jesus, even as Peter had done in healing the crippled man, which brought about this whole episode with the Sanhedrin .

But how were they sure that their prayers were heard? God showed them in a very special way. The building they were in began to shake, as if by an earthquake, they were filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the Word of God in boldness.

As believers, you and I need to learn to pray just like this in troubled times. We need to live in the Triumph of Christ's Resurrection. The same Lord who created this world, still rules over it. He has promised that He will protect and preserve us from all harm and danger, either by turning the evil into our spiritual good, to accomplish His will; or by keeping it far from us.

Psalms 2 is still being fulfilled today. Nations, rulers, and people still rage and plot against Christ in vain. Religious terrorists try to destroy Christians and Christianity. Humanists and evolutionists have tried to destroy the truth of the Word. Ecumenicists have tried to deny that there is only one God and only one way to eternal life, but God through His faithful followers is still making sure His will is being done. His will of having the message of Christ crucified and risen again proclaimed to all the world.

Materialism and hedonism—living only for the pleasures of this life—seem to be taking over and controlling the hearts and lives of more and more people of this world. Many in the liberal camp are trying to destroy the sanctity of marriage and promoting the killing of the unborn, even outside the womb after a botched abortion. It is sickening and horrifying.

We need to pray: **LORD, LOOK ON THEIR THREATS, AND GRANT TO YOUR SERVANTS THAT WITH ALL BOLDNESS WE MAY SPEAK YOUR WORD.**

In all our troubles may we echo this prayer. We need to ask the Lord for patience, for courage and confidence, for joy in suffering, for the ability to accept His will to be done in our lives. And the wonderful thing is that we have the assurance that our prayers will be heard and answered in Jesus' name.

John wrote in his first Epistle: **NOW THIS IS THE CONFIDENCE THAT WE HAVE IN HIM, THAT IF WE ASK ANYTHING ACCORDING TO HIS WILL, HE HEARS US.**

The walls of our church or of our homes may not shake, but through His Word we too will be filled with the Holy Spirit and through Him and the power of that Word we will boldly speak His Word to others and what better opportunity do we have then during this coronavirus time!

The same Lord who shook those walls has commanded and promised us: **"ALL AUTHORITY HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH. GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL THE NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THINGS THAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU; AND LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, EVEN TO THE END OF THE AGE."**

That's all the assurance we need.

God has promised it.
May we glorify Him!

Amen.